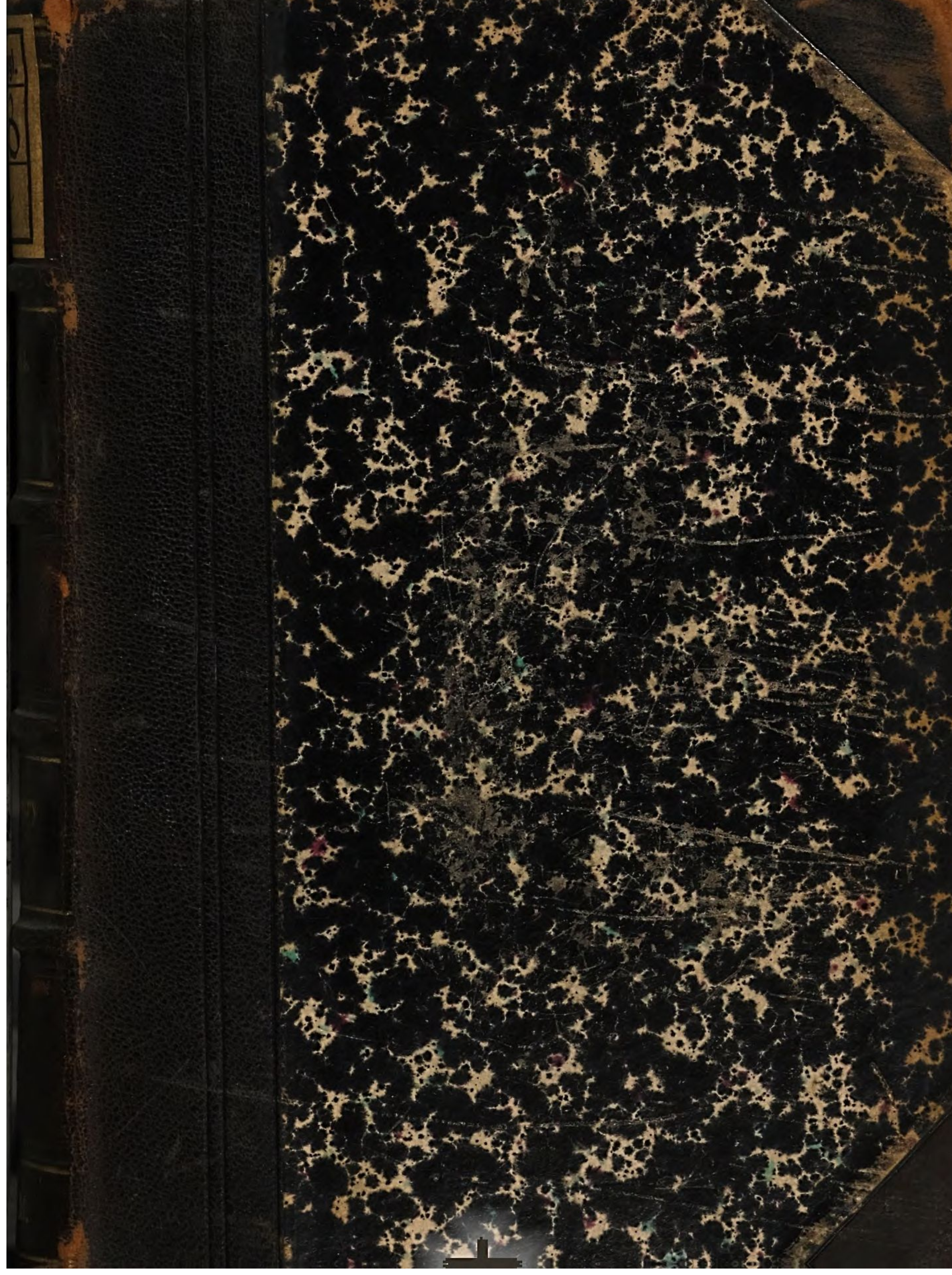




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SHREWSBURY. BY STANLEY J. WEYMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

SHREWSBURY

A ROMANCE

BY

STANLEY J. WEYMAN,

AUTHOR OF "A GENTLEMAN OF FRANCE," "THE RED COCKADE,"

ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1898.



S H R E W S B U R Y.

CHAPTER I.

THE odd and unexpected glimpse of generosity which the King had allowed to escape him, in his interview with the Duke, somewhat lessened the fears I must otherwise have entertained at that moment. To which must be added that I am one of those who, when violence and physical danger are not in question, retain a fair mastery of their minds. Nevertheless, I am free to confess that as I went forward, I wished myself anywhere else in the world, and would have sacrificed half my remaining economies to be seated, pen in hand, and obscurely safe, in Mr. Brome's room.

But the thing took a turn which relieved me when I least expected it. As I approached, the chagrin in the King's face gave place to a look of surprise; and

that again, but more slowly, to one of intelligence. "Ah! *Je me trompais!*" he muttered rapidly. "What did you say his name was?"

"Price," the Duke answered, continuing to glower at me.

"Price? *Ah, cela va sans dire!* But—he is a cadet—a dependent? He is in some way connected—how do you say it—related to your family!"

"To mine, sir!" the Duke exclaimed in a voice of the utmost astonishment; and he drew himself up as if the King had pricked him.

"*N'est-ce pas ça?*" his Majesty replied, looking from one to the other of us. "Yet he has so much a look of you that it might be possible in some lights to take him for your grace, were he differently dressed!"

The Duke looked purely offended. "Your Majesty is under a strange misapprehension," he said, very stiffly. "If this person resembles me—of which I was not aware—I know nothing of the cause; and the likeness for what it is worth, must be accidental. As a fact, I never saw him but once before in my life, sir, and that perfectly by chance." And he very briefly related the circumstances under which we came together.

The King listened to the story, but as if he

scarcely believed it; and he smiled when the Duke came to tell how he allowed me to escape. Then, "And you have never seen him from that day to this?" he said incredulously.

"Never!" said the Duke, positively. "But it is not my intention to lose sight of him again."

"Ah?" the King said.

"I have not told you, sir, all that happened," the Duke continued, reading, I think, the King's thoughts. "But briefly, Mr. Ferguson, who has come to be little short of a madman, drew a pistol on me at the close of our interview; and but for his friend here—who had been placed to listen, but at that broke from his place of hiding and knocked up the muzzle, so that it exploded harmlessly—I should have come off ill."

"And I not much better," the King said, nodding and looking grave. "You are unhurt."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that puts another face on it; and if you are retaining him beside you, what he has now heard will be of the less importance. Hark you, my friend," he continued, addressing me, "can you keep your mouth shut?"

I said humbly that I could and would.

"Then, *Taisez! Taisez!*" he answered emphatic-

ally. "And take this letter to Hogsden Gardens to Bishop Lloyd's. See Bishop Lloyd and put it in his hands. Say nothing, give no message, but go to your master's in St. James's Square. Will you seal it, Duke, with a plain seal? Good. And go you out, man, by the way you came in, and answer no questions. And now for the council and the warrants, my lord. We have lost too much time already!"

To say that I went from the presence without knowing how I did it, and when I reached the courtyard had no more idea how I had gained it, or by what staircase I had descended, than if I had been blind, is but the truth; nor is it to be wondered at when the amazing thing which had happened to me is in the least degree taken into consideration. In truth I walked on air and saw nothing, I was so deeply overjoyed; and though it is certain that as I went out I met one and another, passed the sentries, and ran the gauntlet of curious eyes—for who that quits a court escapes that ordeal?—I was no more conscious of the observations made upon me, or the surprise I excited as I went by, than if I had really walked in the clouds. Issuing from the gates I took by instinct rather than design the road to London, and hugging to my breast the letter which the King

—the King!—had entrusted to me, made the best of my way towards Tyburn.

I had been wiser had I gone by the other road through the village and taken the first coach I found; there are commonly one or two at Kensington waiting to carry passengers to London. But in the fluster of my spirits, I did not measure the distance I had to go, or the time I should consume in walking. My main anxiety for the moment was to be alone; alone, and at leisure to probe my fortune and success, and appreciate both the relief and the good luck I had compassed. I could have sung as I walked; I could have skipped and danced; and a gleam of sunshine breaking the March sky, and gilding the leafless arms of the trees and the flat green pastures that border the road north of Hyde Park, I was moved to raise my hat and look upwards and reverently thank Providence for this wonderful instance of its goodness, which I had not had the heart to do for some time.

When I descended a little to earth—a step which was hastened by a flash of recollection that showed me Ferguson's niece waiting at Clerkenwell Gate, a little figure, forlorn and desolate, yet with eyes of wrath and a face puckered with determination—when I came I say a little to myself and to

think of Hogsden Gardens, and remembered that it lay on the farther side of town by Bunhill Fields, I was already at Tyburn turning; and it seemed to be no longer worth while to ride. The day was on the wane, and the road thence to St. Giles's Pound was lively with persons come out to take the air, through whom I threaded my way at a good pace, and coming to Holborn without mishap, turned up Cow Lane, and so got speedily to Smithfield, and across the market to Long Lane, knowing my way so far without having need to ask.

Here, however, I took sudden fright. My mind, which as I walked had been busy with the girl and the steps I should take to find her—if indeed I wished to find her, about which I was puzzled, the surrounding circumstances being so different—was invaded by the notion that I had been long on the road. To this was added next moment the reflection that messengers sent to arrest the Duke could by taking a coach forestall me. The thought threw me into a hot fit, which increased on me when I considered that I did not know the remainder of the road, and might waste much time in tracing it. Naturally my first impulse in this strait was to seek a guide; but Long Lane by Smithfield is only one degree better than Whetstone Park, and I shrank

from applying to the sots and drabs who stood at the doors and corners, or lounged out of the patched windows, and, lazily or rudely, watched me go by.

In this difficulty, and growing the more diffident and alarmed the more slowly I walked, I looked about eagerly for some person, of passable aspect, of whom I could enquire. I saw none, and my uncertain glances and loitering steps were beginning to draw on me advances and an attention that were anything but welcome, when, reaching a corner where an alley, now removed—I think it was then called Dog Alley—runs out of Long Lane, I saw a man, decently habited, come out of a house a little way down the alley. He closed the door sharply behind him, and, as I looked, went off in the opposite direction.

Here was my opportunity. Without losing a moment I ran after him, and he, hearing my steps, turned; and we came face to face. Then, when it was too late to retreat, I saw with unutterable dismay that the man I had stopped was no stranger, but the person who had dressed me up the night before and taken me to the mysterious house in the suburbs; the man called Smith whom I had first seen under the Piazza in Covent Garden, and again in Ferguson's room.

To come face to face with anyone of the gang with the knowledge that I had but now left the palace after informing against them was of itself enough to make my knees tremble under me. But of this man, though his civil treatment had been in pleasant contrast to Ferguson's brutality, I had conceived an instinctive dread, based as much on his silence and reserve and a sort of strict power with which I credited him, as on his contemptuous treatment of my tyrant. In a word, had I come on Ferguson himself I could scarcely have been more overcome.

On hearing my footsteps he had turned on me very sharply, with the air of a man who had no mind to be followed, and no taste for followers. But on seeing who it was his face grew light and he whistled his surprise. "I was on my way to you," he said, "and here you are. That is good luck. I suppose Ferguson sent you?"

"No," I stammered, avoiding his eyes, and wondering, with inward quakings, what was going to happen to me. "I—I lost my road."

"Oh!" said he, and looked keenly at me. "Lost your road, did you? Well, it was very much to the purpose, as it happened. May I ask where you were going?"

I shifted my feet uneasily. "To Bunhill Fields," I said, naming the first place of which I could think.

"Ah!" he answered, with apparent carelessness, and though it seemed scarcely possible he should fail to observe the heat and disorder into which his presence had thrown me, he made no sign. "Well, you are not far out," he continued, "and I will come with you. When you have done your errand we will talk over my business. This way. I know this end of the town well. And so it was not Ferguson," he added with a sharp look at me, "who sent you after me?"

"No," I said.

"Nor his errand that brought you here?"

"No," I said again, my mouth dry. "And I need not give you the trouble to come with me. I shall be taking you——"

"Out of my way? Not at all," he answered briskly. "And it is no trouble. Come along, my friend."

I dared say no more, nor show farther reluctance; and so, with feet like lead and eyes roving furtively for a way of escape, I turned and went with him. Nay, it was not my feet only that were weighted;

the letter, and my consciousness of it, lay so heavy on my mind that it was like lead in the pocket.

I was indeed in a strait now! And in one so difficult I could discern no way out of it; for though I could in part, and in part only, command my countenance, I failed absolutely to command my thoughts, which did nothing but revolve tumultuously about the words, "What am I to do? What am I to do?" words that seemed written in red letters on my brain. Only one thing was clear to me in the confusion, and that was the urgent necessity I lay under of hiding my errand, the disclosure of which must carry with it the disclosure of the place whence I came and the company I had been keeping. With time to think and coolness to distinguish I should doubtless have seen the possibility of announcing my errand to the Duke, yet laying it on Ferguson's shoulders; but pushed for time and unable at a pinch to weigh all the issues, I could form no determination, much less one leading to so daring a step. After one denial, that is.

In the meantime we moved on; and at first my companion seemed to be unconscious of my sluggish pace and my perturbation. But presently I felt rather than saw that from minute to minute he glanced at me askance, and that after each of these

inspections he laughed silently. The knowledge that I lay under this observation immeasurably increased my embarrassment. I could no longer put a fair face on the matter, but every time he looked at me looked away guiltily, unable to support his eyes. This presently grew so insupportable that to escape from my embarrassment I coughed and affected to choke.

"You have a cold, I am afraid," he said, scarcely concealing the sneer in his tone. "And yet you look warm. You must have walked fast, my friend?"

I muttered that I had.

"To overtake me, perhaps! It was good of you," he said in the same tone of secret badinage. "But we are here. What part of the Fields do you want? Whitecross Street?"

"No," I muttered.

"Then it must be Baxter's Rents."

"No."

"Bunhill Row?"

"No."

"No? Well, there is not much else here," he said; and he shrugged his shoulders, "except the Fields and the burial-ground. Your business does not lie with the latter, I suppose?"

"No," I said faintly. And we stood.

At another time I must have shuddered at the dreary expanse on this uttermost fringe of the town that stretched before us under a waning light; an expanse of waste land broken only by the wall of the burial-ground, or the chimney of a brick-kiln, and bordered, where its limits were visible, by half-built houses, and squatter huts, and vast piles of refuse. Ugly as the prospect was, however, and far from reassuring to the timorous, I asked nothing better than to look at it, and look at it, and continue to look at it. But Mr. Smith, who did not understand this mood, turned with an impatient laugh!

"I suppose you did not come here to look at that," said he.

Like a fool I jumped at the absurd, the flimsy pretext.

"Yes," I said. "I—I merely came to take the air."

The moment the words were spoken I trembled at my audacity. But he took it better than I expected, for he merely paused to stare at me, and then chuckled grimly.

"Well," he said, "then, now that you have taken the air let us go back. Have you anything to object to that, Mr. Taylor?"

I could find nothing.

"I will come with you," he continued. "I want to see Ferguson, and we can settle my business there."

But this only presented to me a dreadful vision of Ferguson, released from his bonds, and mad with rage and the desire to avenge himself; and I stopped short.

"I am not going there," I said.

"No? Then where, may I ask, are you going?" he answered, watching me with a placid amusement, which made it as clear as the daylight, that he saw through my evasions. "Where is it my lord's pleasure to go?"

"To Brome's, in Fleet Street," I said, hoarsely. And if he had had his back to me at that instant, and I a knife in my hand, I could have run him through! For as I said it, and he with mocking suavity assented, and we stepped out together to return the way we had come through Long Lane—over which the sky hung low in a dull yellow haze, the last of the western light—I had a swift and stinging recollection of the King and my lord, and the letter, and the passage of time; and could have sprung from his side, and poured out curses on him in the impotence on my rage and impatience. For the hour of grace which the King had granted was

gone, and a second was passing, and still the letter that should warn the Duke of Berwick lay in my pocket, and I saw no chance of delivering it.

That Smith discerned the chagrin which this enforced companionship caused me—though not the ground of it—was as plain as that the fact gave him pleasure of no common kind. I had no longer such a command of my features that I could trust myself to look at him; but I was conscious, using some other sense, that he frequently looked at me, and always after these inspections, smiled like a man who finds something to his taste. And I hated him.

How long with these feelings I could have borne to go with him, or what I should have done in the last resort had he continued the same tactics, remains unproved; for at the same corner half-way down Long Lane, where I had first espied him, he paused. "I want to go in here," he said coolly. "I need only detain you a moment, Mr. Taylor."

"I will wait for you," I muttered, tingling all over with sudden hope. While he was inside I could run for it.

"Very well," he said. "This way."

I fancied that he suspected nothing, and that perhaps I had been wrong throughout; and overjoyed I went with him to the door of the house from which

I had seen him emerge; my intention being to be-gone hotfoot the instant his back was turned. The house was three-storied high, narrow and commonplace, one of a row not long built, and but partially inhabited. Apparently he was at home there, for taking a key from his pocket, he opened the door; and stood aside for me to enter.

"I will wait," I muttered.

"Very well. You can wait inside," he answered.

If I had been wise I should have turned there and then, in the open street, and taking to my heels have run for my life and stayed for nothing. But, partly fool and partly craven, clinging to a hope which was scarcely a belief, that when he went upstairs or into another room, I might stealthily unlatch the door and begone, I let myself be persuaded; and I entered. The moment I had done so, he whipped out the key and thrusting the door to with his shoulder, locked it on the inside.

Then the man threw off all disguise. He turned with a laugh of triumph to where I stood trembling in the half-dark passage. "Now," he said, "we will have that letter, if you please, Mr. Taylor. I have a fancy to see what is in it."

"The letter!" I faltered.

"Yes, the letter!"

"I have no letter," I said.

"Tut-tut, letter or no letter, out with it! Do you think I could not see you touching your breast every half minute, to make sure that you had it safe—and not know what was in the wind! You are a poor plotter, Mr. Taylor, and I doubt if you will ever be of any use to me. But come, out with it! Unless you want me to be rough with you. Out with whatever it is you have there, and no tricks!"

He had a way with him when he spoke in that tone, not loudly but between his teeth, his eyes at the same time growing towards one another, that was worse than Ferguson's pistol; and I was alone with him in an empty house. Some, who would have done what I did, may blame me; but in the main the world is sensible, and I shall forfeit no prudent man's esteem when I confess that, after one attempt at evasion which he met by wrenching my coat open, and thrusting me against the wall so violently that my head spun again, I gave up the letter.

"I warn you! I warn you!" I cried, in a paroxysm of rage and grief. "It is for the Duke of Berwick, and if you open it——"

"For the Duke of Berwick?" he answered, pausing and gazing at me with his finger on the seal. "Why, you fool, why did you not tell me

that before? From whom? From that scum, Ferguson?"

"From the Duke of Shrewsbury," I cried, rendered reckless by my rage.

"What?" he cried, in a voice of extraordinary surprise.

"From the Duke of Shrewsbury," I repeated; thinking that he had not understood me.

"My God!" he said, with a deep breath. "And have I caught the fox at last!"

"You are more likely to be caught yourself!" I answered, furiously.

Nevertheless, his words were a puzzle to me; but his tone of slow growing, almost incredulous triumph told something. Taking very little heed of me, and merely signing to me to follow him, he sprang up the stairs, and opening a door led the way into a back room bare and miserable, but lighted by the last yellow glow of the western sky. It was possible to read here, and without a moment's hesitation he broke the seal of the letter, and tearing the packet open, read the contents.

That the perusal gave him immense satisfaction his face, which in the level light, cast by the window, seemed to gleam with unholy joy, was witness, no less than his movements. Flourishing the letter in

uncontrollable excitement he twice strode the floor, muttering unformed sentences. Then he looked at the paper again and his jaw fell. "But it is not his hand!" he cried, staring at it in very plain dismay. And then recovering himself afresh, "No matter," he said. "It is his name, and the veriest fool would have used another hand. Is it yours? Did you write it, blockhead?"

"No," I said.

"No! But now I think of it—thousand devils, how came you by it? By this—eh?" he rapped out. "This letter? What d——d hocus pocus is here? What have you to do with the Duke of Shrewsbury, that he makes you his messenger?"

He bent his brows on me, and I knew that I had never been in greater danger in my life. Yet something of evil came to me in this extremity. Comprehending that if I said I came from Kensington I might expect the worst, I lied to him; yet used the truth where it suited me. "The Duke came to Ferguson's," I said.

"To Ferguson's?" he answered, staring at me.

"Yes, and bade him get that to the Duke, for his lodging was known and warrants would be out."

Smith clapped his hands together softly. "What!" he cried. "Is he in it as deep as that? Oh, the

cunning! Oh, the cunning of him! And I to be going to all this trouble, and close on despair at that! And Ferguson gave you the letter?"

"They both did."

"That old fox, too! And I was beginning to think him a bygone! Yet he beats us all! he beats us all! Or he would have beaten us if he had not trusted this silly. But I am forgetting. The Duke must be warned—if he has not started. When was this given to you, Mr. Trusty Taylor?"

"Two hours ago," I said, sullenly.

I was pleased to see that that alarmed him. "You fool!" he said, "why did you not tell me at once what you had got, and whither you were going? If the Duke is taken it will lie at your door. And if he is saved, it will be to my credit."

"I will come with you," I said, plucking up a spirit as I saw him about to leave.

"No, you will not," he answered, drily. "I am much obliged to you, but I prefer to gain the credit and tell the tale my own way. You will stay here, Mr. Taylor, and when the Duke is away I'll come and release you. In the meantime I would advise you to keep quiet. Hoity-toity, what is this?" he continued, as in my despair I tried to push by him. "Go back,

you fool, or it will be the worse for you. You are *not* going out."

And, resisting all my appeals and remonstrances, he thrust me forcibly from the door; and whipping outside it, locked it on me. In vain I hammered on it with my fist and called after him, and threatened him. He clattered unheeding down the stair, and I heard the house-door slammed and locked. I listened a moment, but all remained quiet; and then, wild with rage, I turned to the window, thinking that by that way I might still escape. Alas, it looked only into a walled yard, and was strongly barred to boot.

God knows I thought myself then the most unlucky of men; a man ruined when on the point of a great and seemingly assured success. I flung myself down in my despair, and could have dashed my head against the boards. But presently, in the midst of my bewailing myself, and when the first convulsive fit of rage was abating, a new thought brought me to my feet in a panic. What if Smith, before he returned, fell in with Ferguson? The meeting was the more probable, inasmuch as, if Ferguson succeeded in freeing himself, he was as likely to hasten to the Duke of Berwick to warn him as to do anything else. At any rate I was not inclined to sit weighing

the chances nicely, but hastening frantically to the door, I tried it with knee and shoulder. To my joy it yielded somewhat; on which, throwing caution aside, I drew back and flung myself against it with all my weight. The lock gave way, and the door flying open, I came near to falling headlong down the stairs.

Still, I had succeeded. But I soon found that I was little nearer freedom than before. The passage was now dark, and the house-door, when I found my way to it, resisted all my efforts. This drove me to seek another egress, which it was far from easy to find. At length, and by dint of groping about, I hit on a door which led into a downstairs room; it was unlocked and I entered, feeling before me with my hands. The darkness, the silence of the empty house, and my hurry, formed a situation to appal the boldest; but I was desperate, and extending my arms I trod cautiously across the room to where the window should be, and sought for and found the shutters. I tried the bar, and to my joy felt it swing. I let it down softly and dragged the shutters open, and sweating at every pore, saw through the leaded panes the dark dull lane outside, with a faint light from a neighbouring window falling on the wall opposite.

I was seeking for a part of the window that opened, and wondering whether, failing that, I should have the courage to burst the casement and run for it, when a step approaching along the lane set my heart beating. The step came nearer and paused, and peering out, my face nearer the glass, I saw a man had come to a stand before the door. I looked, and then, to say that my knees quivered under me but faintly expresses the terror I felt! For as the man moved he brought himself within the circle of light I have mentioned, and at the same time he raised his face, doubtless after searching in his pocket for the key; and through the glass my eyes met those of Ferguson.

CHAPTER II.

IF, a few minutes before, I had thought myself the most unlucky of men and placed by that which had already happened beyond fear or misfortune, I knew better when I saw that sight from the window; and fell back into the darkness, as if even from the road and through the panes Ferguson's eyes must discover me. Ignorant whether the room in which I stood contained anything to shelter me, or bare-walled must of necessity discover me to the first person who entered with a light, my natural impulse, when the moment of panic passed, was to escape from it.

But it was not easy to do this in haste. By the time that, trembling in every limb, I had groped my way into the passage, the key was turning in the lock of the outer door, and I saw myself within an arm's length of capture. This so terrified me that I sprang desperately for the staircase, but stumbled over the lowest step, and fell on my knees with a crash that seemed to shake the walls. For a moment the pain was so sharp that I could only lie where I

fell; nor when, spurred by the imminence of the danger, I had got to my feet, could I do more than crawl up the stairs and crouch down on the landing, a little to one side, and out of eye-shot from below.

Willingly now, in return for present safety, would I have forgiven Fortune all her past buffets; for if Ferguson came up, as I thought him sure to come up, I was lost; since I could neither retreat without noise, nor if I could, knew where to hide. In this extremity, my heart beating so thickly that I could scarcely listen, and thought I must choke, I was relieved to hear Ferguson—after spending what seemed to me to be an age, striking flint and steel in the passage—go grumbling into the lower room, whence a glimmer falling on the wall of the passage told me that he had at last succeeded in procuring a light.

It was no surprise to me as I sweated and cringed in my hiding-place, to learn that he was in the worst of tempers. I heard him swear—as I supposed—at the open shutter; then, almost before I had thanked Providence for present safety, he was out again in the passage. I made no doubt that he was going to ascend now, and I gave myself up for lost. But instead, he stood and called “Mary! Mary!

W

W

A

A

A

W

W

W

Do ye hear, you hussy? If ye are hiding above there, it will be the worse for you, ye d——d baggage! Come down, d'ye hear me?"

Surely now, I thought, getting no answer, he would come up, and my heart stood. But it seemed he called only to make sure, and not because he thought that she was above; for he went back into the lower room, and I heard him moving to and fro, and going about to light a fire, the crackling of which gave an odd note of cheerfulness in the house. I was beginning to weigh the possibility of slipping by the half-open door, on the chance of finding the outer door unfastened; and with this in view, had risen to my feet, when a key again grated in the lock, and supposing it to be Smith, I returned to my former position.

Had it been Smith, it would have been some comfort to me; for I thought him more prudent if no less dangerous than the plotter, and I fancied that I had more to fear from one than from two. But the step that entered was lighter than a man's, while Ferguson's greeting told the rest and made the situation clear.

"Ha, you are here at last, are you!" he cried with an angry oath. "Did you want me to break every bone in your body, lass, that you stayed out

till now, and I to have the fire to light? You should have a pretty good tale to tell or have kept clear of this! D'ye hear me? Speak, you viper, and don't stand there glowering like a wood-cat!"

"I am here now;" was the answer. My heart leapt, for the voice was Mary's; the tone, sullen and weary, I could understand.

"Here now!" he retorted. "And that is to be all, is it? Perhaps, my girl, I will presently show you two minds about that. Where is the baggage?"

"It is not here."

"Not here?" he cried.

"No," she answered.

"And why not, you Jezebel?"

"You need not misname me," she answered coolly. "I was followed and could not come here; and I could not carry it about with me all day. And I could not send it, for there was no one here to take it in. It is at the Spread Eagle in Gracechurch Street, to go by to-morrow's waggon to Colchester. That is what I told them, but it can be fetched away to-morrow."

"If I did not think you were a big liar, girl?" he answered doubtfully; but I knew by his tone that he believed her.

"You may think what you like," she replied,

"And how do you think I am to do for to-night?" he answered querulously.

"You must do as you can," she said. "You have your Hollands, and I have brought some bread and meat."

"It is a dog's life," he said, with a snarl.

"It is the life you choose," she retorted sharply.

"*Peste!*" he answered after a pause of sheer astonishment at her audacity. "What is it to you, you slut?"

"Why, a dog's life too! and not of my choice!" she cried passionately, her voice breaking. "What am I better, as I live, than an orange girl in the streets? What do I get, and walk the pavement on your errands night and day? What do I get? And always hiding and sneaking, hiding and sneaking! And for what?"

"For your living, you beggarly baggage!" he roared. "Who feeds you and clothes you, you graceless hussy? Who boards you and lodges you, and finds you in meat and malt, you feckless toad? You shameless——"

"Ay, call names!" she answered bitterly—and it was not hard to discern that she was beside herself with the long sick waiting and the disappointment. "It is what you are good for! It is all that your

plots end in! Call names, and you are happy! But I am tired, and tired of it, I tell you. I am tired of bare boards and hiding, and all for what? For those that, when you have brought them back, you will be as fierce to oust as you are now to restore! And shameless it is you call me?" she continued with feverish rapidity. "Shameless? Have you not sent me out into the streets a hundred times, and close on midnight, and not a thought or care what would happen to me so long as your letter went safe? Have you not sent me where to be taken was to be jailed and whipped, and not a thought of pity or what a life it was for a girl? Have you not done this and more?" she continued, breathless with passion. "And more? And yet you take praise for feeding me! And call me graceless and shameless."

She paused and gave him room to speak, but though he put on a show of bluster it was evident her violence alarmed him. "Odd's name, and what is all this?" he said. "What ails the girl? What has set you up now, you vixen?"

"You!" she cried vehemently. "You and your trade!"

"Well," he said, with a sort of sullen reasonableness, "and what is the matter with the trade? What

is wrong with the trade, I say? I'll tell you this, my lass, you would live badly without it."

"I would live honestly," she cried. "And as my father lived!"

"You drab!" he cried. "Leave that alone."

At that, and when judging from the tone of his voice I expected him to break out with fresh oaths and curses, there was instead an astonishing silence, which fell for me at an unlucky moment, for forgetting, in my desire to see as well as hear, the risk I ran, I had crept down the stairs, and now lacked but a pace of seeing into the room. The noise ceasing, I dared neither take that step nor retreat; and it was only when the silence had continued so long that curiosity overcame fear, that I ventured the advance, and looking in, saw that the girl, her fire and fury gone, was leaning against the wall beside the hearth, her face averted; while Ferguson himself, in an attitude of dejection scarcely less marked, stood near her, his head bowed and his blood-shot eyes fixed on the fire.

"Ay, he lived honestly, your father," he muttered at last. "It is true, my lass. I grant it. But he had a fair wind, had Alan, and a short course; and if he had lived to be sixty, God knows! We are what we are made. I mind him well, and the burn

we fished and the pickle things we took out, and your mother that played with us in her cutty sark, and not a shoe between us nor a bodle of money; but the green hills round us, and all we knew of the world that it lay beyond them. And that was all your father ever knew, my lass. And well for him! Ay, well for him! But woe's me, and woe to the man who took my living, and woe to the evil King!"

His voice was beginning to rise; in a moment he would have reached his usual pitch of denunciation, of which even now some of his many writings afford a pale reflection; but at the word *King* there came a sharp knocking at the door, and he paused. For me, I turned in a panic, and, heedless what noise I made, hurried up the stairs. The steps creaked under me, but fortunately the knocking was repeated so quickly and persistently that it covered the sound of my flight; and before I had more than ensconced myself in the old place, Ferguson, doubtless in obedience to some signal, was at the door and had opened it.

Immediately half-a-dozen men poured noisily in, breathing hard and growling in low tones, and passed into the room below. But until the outer door was closed and secured, nothing I could catch, though

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fear sharpened my ears, was said. Then, as Ferguson went in after them, one of the newcomers raised his voice in answer to a question, and cried with a rattling oath, "What is up? What is up, old fox? Why, all is up! And we'll all swing for it before the month is over, if we cannot clear out to-night! You are a clever one, Mr. Ferguson, but you are caught this time, with better men. God! if I had the sneak here that peached on us, I would cut his liver out! I would——"

Two or three voices joined in to the same tune and drowned his words, one asking where Prendergast was, another where Porter was, a third indulging in threats so horrid and blasphemies so profane that I turned cold where I crouched. I began to understand what had happened, and my situation; but that nothing might be spared me Ferguson, in a quavering voice that proved all was news to him, asked again what was the matter.

"The Blues are moved," cried three or four at once. "They were marching out when we left. The guards at Kensington are doubled, and the orders for the King's hunting to-morrow are cancelled. They were hurrying to and fro calling the Council when we came away, and messengers were beginning to go round the taverns."

"And they have seized the horses at the King of Bohemia's Head," added another, "so they know a lot."

"But is it—certain?" Ferguson asked, with a break in his voice.

"Ay, as certain as that we shall hang if we do not get over!" was the brutal answer.

"And the Captain?"

"I have been at his lodgings. He has not been heard of since noon. He ordered his horse then and they say took the road; and hell to it, if that is so, he is half way to France by this! And safe! Safe, you devils, and we are left here caught like rats!"

"Ay, we'll go farther than France!" one shrieked. "As for me I am off. I shall——"

"No, by God, you don't!" cried another; and flung himself, as it seemed to me, between him and the door. "You don't go and sell the rest of us, and save your own neck. You——"

"Where is Porter?" a third struck in.

"And Prendergast?"

"They are not here! Nor Sir William! Nor Friend! So what is the good of talking like that?"

"He will make a fat hang, will Sir William!" said

one, with a mad laugh that died in his throat. "It will cure his gout."

At that, one of the others cried with furious oaths for liquor; and I judged that Ferguson gave them of his Hollands. But it was little among so many, and was gone in a moment, and they calling for more. "There is a keg upstairs," said he. "In the back-room. But get it for yourselves. You have hung me. To think that I should have played the game with such fools."

They laughed recklessly, a savage note in their voices. "Ah, you should have stuck to your pen, old fox," one cried. "Then it was only the printer hung. But we'll drink your health before you swing. Up, Keyes, and fetch the stuff. It may be bad, but we'll drink to the squeezing of the rotten orange once more; if it be the last toast I drink!"

CHAPTER III.

THE terror that had gripped me on their first entrance, and driving all the blood in my body to my heart had there set it bounding madly—this terror I should vainly try to describe to persons who have never been in such a situation or within a few feet of death, as I then found myself. Then, reckless and driven to the wall, the conspirators would sacrifice me to their vengeance if they discovered me I felt certain; and at any moment they might come up and discover me. Yet behind me were the confining walls of the rooms whence I knew of no exit, and before me, where alone evasion seemed to be possible, the open door of the room below, and the flood of light that issued from the doorway, forbade the attempt. I lay sweating and listening therefore, while they snarled and cursed in the black mood of men betrayed and hopeless; and yet because of the chance that after all they might go out as they had come, I could so far keep my terror within bounds.

Not so, when I heard Ferguson bid the man

mount and fetch the keg. Had he come without a light I might still have controlled myself and kept quiet; and holding my breath though I were suffocated, and silencing my heart though I died, might have lain and let him pass in the darkness. Nay, had I crouched low, he need not have observed me with a light; for I was a little beside the stairhead, and to enter the room whence I had broken out he need not face me. But when I heard him stumbling upwards, a sudden sense of the loneliness of the house in that far corner of town came on me; and with it, an overwhelming perception of my helplessness and of the life and death struggle to which the men below were committed — so that death seemed to be in the air; which together so far overcame me that I did the last thing I should have expected. As the man came up the stairs, the light in his hand, I rose up and stood, gasping at him.

He paused and held up the light. "The devil!" he said, staring. And then, "Who the —— are you? Here, Ferguson! Here's your man!"

The only answer from below was a roar for liquor.

"What are you doing here?" he went on, puzzled as much by my silence as my presence.

"I am—going," I stammered; a desperate hope rising in my breast at sight of the man's perplexity. He might let me pass.

For aught I know he would have done so; and it is possible that I might have gone unseen by the open door below and gained the street. But as he stood staring, a second man came into the passage, and looked up and saw me. "Hallo!" he said. "Who is that?"

"Ferguson's man," Keyes answered. "But, boil me, if I know what is the matter with him!"

The other called Ferguson and he came out, and saw me; looked, and with a scream of rage, sprang up the stairs. In the fury of his wrath—he threw himself on me so suddenly and with so much violence and intention that I was a child in his hands; and but for the other's exertions, who not understanding the matter tore him from me, I must have been choked out of hand. As it was I was black in the face, dizzy, and scarcely conscious when they freed me from him: nor in much better case for the respite. For with all they could do he would not release my shoulder, but dragging me down, cried breathlessly and continuously to the others to listen—to listen! That he had the traitor! that I was the informer! the spy, the blood-seller! And with that,

and as he partly forced and partly tugged me down the men thickened round me, until dragged into the lighted room I found myself hemmed in by a circle of lowering faces and gloomy eyes, a circle that, look where I might, presented no breach or chance of escape, no face that pitied or understood. He who seemed to be in highest authority among them—afterwards I knew him for Charnock, the unfrocked Fellow of Magdalen, who suffered with King and Keyes—did indeed make Ferguson let me go; thrusting him back and calling on him to tell his tale, and have done with his blasphemy. But though I turned that way in momentary hope of aid, I read no encouragement in a face as stern and relentless as it was fanatical. A lamp hooked high on one wall, and so that it threw its light downwards, obscured half the circle, and flung a bright glare on the other half; but in light or shade, seen or unseen, and whether drink flushed it, or passion blanched it, every face that met my shrinking gaze seemed to be instinct with coming doom.

In such situations fear, which spurs some minds, paralyses others. Vainly I tried to think, to frame a defence, to deny or avoid. The glare of the lamp dazzled and confused me. To Ferguson's passionate iterations, "The Lord has delivered him into our

hands! I tell you, the Lord has delivered him into our hands! There is your informer! I swear it! I can prove it!" I could find no answer except a feeble, "I am not! I am not!" which I continued to repeat—while one plucked me this way that he might see me better, and another that way—until Keyes struck me on the mouth, and thrusting me back bade me be silent.

"And you, too, Mr. Ferguson," Charnock said, raising his hand to still the tumult, "have done with your blasphemy. And talk plainly. Say what you know, and have no fear; if what you allege be proved, we will do justice on him."

"Ay, by ——!" cried Cassel, the swearer. "A life for a life."

"But, first, what do you know?" Charnock continued brusquely. "Speak to the point. We must be gone by midnight if we are to save ourselves."

Then, and then only, I think, Ferguson, hitherto blinded by rage, became sensible of the fact that he stood himself in a dubious position; and that to tell all, and particularly to reveal the visit which the Secretary had paid to him at his lodgings, would, even with the addition of the attempt he had made on the Duke's life, place his conduct in a light far from favourable. Not only were the men before him

in no mood to draw fine distinctions, or take all for granted, but it was on the credit of his name and as his tool that I had come to be mixed up in the matter and gained my knowledge of it. It took no great acuteness, therefore, to foresee that their suspicions, once roused, they would punish first and prove afterwards, and be as ready to turn on the master as the man.

These, when I came to review the scene afterwards, coolly and in safety, were, I had no doubt, the reflections that gave Ferguson pause at the last moment, and occasioned a kind of fit into which he fell at that—his eyes glaring, his jaws moving dumbly, and his hands springing out in uncouth gestures, like those of a man half-paralysed—a fit which at the time was set down to pure rage and a temper of mind always bordering on the insane. I suppose that in that moment, and under cover of that display, his crafty brain, apt in such crises, did its work, for when he found his voice he had his tale pat; and where truth and a lie most ingeniously and sometimes inexplicably mixed would scarcely serve his turn or win him credence, he imposed on them, even on Charnock, by pure scorn and an air of superior knowledge.

“What I know?” said he. “You shall have it.

It is enough to blast him ten times. To-day it happened that the Secretary came to me to my lodgings."

For a moment the roar of surprise which followed this statement, silenced him. But in a moment he recovered himself.

"Ay!" he said, looking round him, defiantly. "The Secretary. What of it? Do you think that you know everything, or that everything is told to you? To-day, I say, the Duke of Shrewsbury came to my lodgings."

"Why?" cried Charnock, between his teeth. "Why?"

"Why?" Ferguson answered. "Well, if you will have it, to send a message through me to the other Duke, as he has done three times before since his Grace has been in England."

"To the Duke of Berwick?"

"What other Duke is there?" the plotter asked, scornfully.

"But G——! If the Secretary knows that his Grace is in England——"

"Well?"

"What will he not know?"

"I cannot say what he will not know, Mr. Charnock," the plotter answered, with a cunning smile

that brought his wig to his eyebrows. "But I can say what he did not know. He knew nothing of your little business. For the rest, when he left me I missed my man here, and coming to enquire, learned that he had been seen to join the Secretary at the door of the house, speak to him, and go away with him. That was enough for me. I changed my lodging, slipped away here, and had been here an hour when you came. As soon as you said that someone had peached to-day I knew who it was. Then Keyes cried that he was here, and there he was."

"But how did he come to be here?" Charnock asked sternly, and with suspicion.

"God knows!" said Ferguson, shrugging his shoulders; "I don't."

"You did not bring him?"

"Go to, for a fool! Perhaps he came to listen, perhaps he was sent. He knew of this place. For the rest, I have told you all I know, and it is enough or should be. Hang the dog up! There is a beam and a hook. You hound, you shall swing for it!" he shrieked, passionately, as he brought his crimson, blotched face close to mine, and threatened me with his two swollen fingers. "You thought to outwit me, did you? You, you dog! You crossed me and thought to sell me, did you? You dolt! you zany!"

you are sold yourself! Sold and shall swing! Swing! Ay, and so shall all my enemies perish!"

"An end to that," said Charnock, pushing him away roughly. "All the same, if this is true, he shall swing."

"Well, it is true enough," cried a man thrusting himself forward, while with shaking knees and chattering teeth, and tongue that refused to do its work, I strove to form words, to speak, to say or do something—something that might arrest the instant doom that threatened me. "It is true enough," continued he coolly. "I was on the watch at the Kensington end this afternoon and saw the Secretary arrive and go in to the Dutchman. And he had this bully boy with him. I know him again and can swear to him."

CHAPTER IV.

I BELIEVE that it is one thing to confront with calmness a death that is known to be inevitable, and quite another and a far more difficult thing to assume the same brow where hope and a chance remain. I am not greatly ashamed, therefore, that in a crisis which amply justified all the horror and repugnance which mortals feel at the prospect of sudden and violent dissolution, I fell below the heroic standard, and said and did things, *miles impar Achilli*.

Nevertheless, it is with no good-will I dwell on the matter; in writing, as in life, there are decencies and indecencies; things to be told and others to be implied. Let few words then suffice, alike for the moment when Charnock, holding back the others, wrung from me, half-swooning as I was, the admission that I had been to Kensington, and that the sentry was not mistaken: and for those minutes of frenzied terror which followed, when screaming and struggling in their grasp, now trying to fling myself

down, and now shrieking prayers for mercy, I was dragged to a spot below the hook, and held there by relentless fingers while a rope was being fetched from the next room. I had no vision, as I have read some have, of the things done in my life: but the set, dark faces that hemmed me in under the light, the grim looks of one, and the scared pallor of another, even Ferguson's hideous visage as he hovered in the background, biting his nails between terror and exultation—all these, even enlarged and multiplied, I saw with a dreadful clearness, and a keenness of vision that of itself was torture.

"Oh, God!" I cried at last. "Help! Help!" For from man I could see no help.

"Ay, man, pray," said Charnock, inexorably. "Pray, for you must die. We will give you one minute. Here comes the rope. Who will fasten it?"

"A fool," cried a hard gibing voice, from somewhere beyond the circle. "No other."

I started convulsively: I had forgotten the girl's presence. So doubtless had the conspirators, for at the sound they turned quickly towards her; and, the ring of men opening out in the movement, she became visible to me. She stood confronting all, daring all. Her lips red, her face white as paper, her eyes glittering with a strange, wild fierceness. Long after-

wards she told me that the sound of my shrieks and cries ringing in her ears had been almost more than she could bear: that as scream rose on scream she had driven the nails into her palms until her hands bled, and so only had been able to restrain herself, knowing well that if she would intervene to the purpose her time was not yet.

Now that it had come, nothing could exceed the mockery and scorn that rang in her tone. "A fool," she cried, stridently, "has fetched it, and a fool will fasten it! And, let who hang, they will hang. And two of you. Ay, you at the back there, will hang them. Why, you are fools, you are all fools, or you would take care that every man among you put his hand to the job, and was as deep as another. Or, if you like precedence, and it is a question of fastening—for the man who fetched, he is as good as dead already—let the hand that wove the noose, tie it! Let that man tie it!" And with pitiless finger she pointed to the old plotter, who, sneaking, and cringing in the background, had already his eye on the door and his mind on retreat. "Let him tie it!" she repeated.

"You slut!" he roared, his eyes squinting, his face livid with fury. "Your tongue shall be slit. To your garret, vixen."

But the others, as was not unnatural, saw the

matter in a different light. "By ——, the wench is right!" cried Cassel; and Keyes saying the same, and another backing him, there was a general chorus of "Ay, the girl is right! The girl is right!" At that the man who had brought the rope, threw it down. "There's for me!" he said, gloomily, and with an ugly gleam in his eyes. "Let the old devil take it up. It is his job, not mine, and if I swing, he shall swing too."

"Fair!" cried all. "That is fair!" And, "That is fair, Mr. Ferguson," said Charnock. "Do you put the rope round his neck."

"I?" Ferguson spluttered; glaring from under his wig.

"Yes, you!" the man who had brought the rope retorted with violence. "You! And why not, I'd like to know, my gentleman?"

"I am no hangman!" cried the plotter, with a miserable assumption of dignity.

But the words and the evasion only inflamed the general rage. "And are we?" Cassel roared, with a volley of oaths. "You covenanting, psalm-singing, tub-thumping old quill-driver!" he continued. "Do you think that we are here to do your dirty work, and squeeze throats at your bidding? *Peste!* For a gill of Hollands I would split your tongue for you.

That and your pen have done too much harm already!"

"Peace!" Charnock said. "Go softly, man. And do you, Mr. Ferguson, take up the rope and do your part. Otherwise we shall have strange thoughts of you. There have been things said before, and it were well you gave no colour to them."

I cannot believe that even I, writhing as a few minutes before I had writhed in their hands, and screaming and begging for life, could have presented a more pitiable spectacle than Ferguson exhibited, thus brought to book. All the base and craven instincts of a low and cowardly nature, brought to the surface by the challenge thus flung in his face, he quailed and cowered before the men; and shifting his feet and breathing hard glanced askance, first at one and then at another, as if to see who would support him, or who could most easily be persuaded. But he found scant encouragement anywhere; the men, savage and ill-disposed, to begin, and driven to the wall, to boot, had now conceived suspicions, and in proportion as delay and his conduct diverted their rage from me, turned it on him with growing ferocity.

"Here is the cock of the pit!" cried Keyes, who seemed to be a trooper and a man of no education,

lacking even the occasional French word or accent that betrayed the others' sojourn with King Louis. "D—— him! He would have us hang the man, but won't lay a finger on him himself! He is no Ketch, isn't he? Well, I hang no man either, unless I put a hand on *him*." And he pointed full at the plotter.

A murmur of assent, stern and full of meaning, echoed his words.

"Mr. Ferguson," said Charnock, with grave politeness, "you hear what this gentleman says? And mind you, if you ask me, he has reason. A few minutes ago you were forward with us to hang this person. And among gentlemen to urge another to do what you will not do yourself, lays you open to comment. It may even be pretended, that if your rogue informed, you were not so ignorant of the fact as you would have us believe you."

It was wonderful to see how the men, sore and desperate, caught at that notion, and with what greedy ferocity they turned on the knave who, only a few moments before, had swayed their passions to his will. It was to no purpose that Ferguson, head and hands shaking as with a palsy, strove frantically to hurl back the accusation. His wonted profanity seemed to fail him on this occasion, while the violence

which had daunted men of saner temperaments proved no match for Cassel's brutality, who, breaking in on him before he had stammered a score of words, called him liar and sneak, and, denouncing him with outstretched finger, was in the act to hound his comrades on him, when something caught the ear of one of them, and with a cry of alarm this man, who stood near the door, raised his hand for silence.

Rage died down in the others' faces, and involuntarily they clustered together. But the panic was of short duration; hardly had the alarm been given and taken, or the lamp which hung against the wall been snatched down and shaded, before the sound of a key in the door reassured the conspirators. For me, who throughout the scene, last described, had leaned half-swooning against the wall, listening, with what feelings the reader may easily judge, to the contest for my life—for me, who now stood reprieved, and for the moment safe, any change might be expected to be fraught with terror. But whether I had passed the bitterness of death, or sheer terror had exhausted my capacity for suffering, it is certain that I awaited the event with lack-lustre eyes; and hearing a cry of, "It's Mat Smith!" felt neither fear nor surprise, nor even moved, when Smith

entered, followed by a woman, and with a quick glance took in the room and its occupants.

"Good," said Cassel with an oath. "I thought that the soldiers were on us. But if they had been, curse me, but I would have sent this old Judas to his place before me!"

Smith looked with a grim smile from the speaker to Ferguson; and raising his eyebrows, "Judas," said he, with ironical politeness, as he laid his cloak and cane upon the table, "is it possible that you refer to my friend Mr. Ferguson?"

"Strangle your friend!" Cassel answered coarsely. "Do you know that his man there has blown on the thing and and sold us?"

Smith's eye had already found me, where I leaned against the wall, my hands tied. "I see," he said coolly. "I knew before that the game was up; and I have been somewhere, and warned someone," he added, with a glance at Charnock, who nodded. "But I did not know how they had the office."

"He gave it! That is how they had it!" Cassel retorted. "And it is my belief that like man like master! And that that poor piece there would no more have dared to inform without his patron's leave than——"

He left the end of his sentence to be understood;

but Charnock, taking up the tale and disregarding Ferguson's mutterings, described in a few words what had happened. When he came to the girl's intervention in my behalf, the woman who had entered with Smith, and who, though she seemed to be known to the conspirators—for her appearance caused no remark—had hitherto remained fidgetting in the background, moved forward into the room; and approaching the girl, who was sitting moodily at a table by the fire, touched her cheek with her fingers, and slipping her hand under her chin, turned up her face. To this the girl made no resistance, and the two women remained looking into one another's eyes for a long minute. Then the elder, who was the same woman I had seen with Smith at the great lady's house in the outskirts, let the girl's face drop again, with a little flirt of her fingers.

“Doris and Strephon, I see?” she said with a sneer.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT the girl answered I did not catch, for as she raised her head again to reply, my ear caught the sound of rising danger. Ferguson was speaking, his words, no longer coherent, a mere frothing of oaths and calling of hideous fates on his head if he had ever betrayed, if he had ever sold, if he had ever deceived, now ran in a steady current of wrathful denunciation. And the men listened; he had their ears again; he was no longer on his trial. Afterwards I learned that while my attention was astray with the women, Smith, by stating what I had stated to him—namely, that the Secretary had used Ferguson as the intermediary through whom to warn Berwick—had confirmed the plotter's story, and at a stroke had restored his position. Whereon, full of spite, and desperately certain that however exposed he lay on other sides I at any rate knew enough to hang him, the wretched man had set himself anew to compass my destruction. Deterred neither by the check he had received, nor by the gloomy looks of

the conspirators, who responded but sluggishly to his appeal, he drove home again and again, and with wild words and wilder oaths, the one point on which he relied, the one point that was so dear to him that he could not understand their hesitation.

"Waste of time?" he cried. "We would be better employed looking to ourselves and slipping away to Romney, would we? But you are fools! You are babes! There is the evidence that can swear to you all! There is the evidence keen to do it! There is the evidence in your hands! And you will let him escape?"

"There is evidence without him," said King sulkily. "Where is Prendergast?"

"Oh, he is honest."

"But where is he? And where is Porter?"

"Where is Sir John Fenwick for that matter?" replied the man who had answered for Prendergast. "He is too high and mighty to mix with us, and will only eat the chestnut when we have got it out of the fire. For that matter, where are Friend and Parkyns? They are not here."

"Pshaw!" Ferguson cried, in a rage at the digression. "Why will you be thinking of them? Cannot you see that they are tainted, they are in it?"

They cannot if they will! And they are gentlemen besides, and not dirty knaves like this fellow."

"For the matter of that," said Cassel, bluntly, "Preston was a lord. But he sold Ashton."

The words brought a kind of cold breath of suspicion into the room, at the chill touch of which each looked stealthily at his neighbour, as if he said, "Is it he? Or he?" Ferguson seeing on this that he made little progress, and that the men, though they looked at me vengefully, were not to be kindled, grew furious and more furious, and began to storm and rave. But Charnock in a moment cut him short.

"Mr. Ferguson is so far right," said he, "that if we let this person go to perfect his evidence against us, we shall be very foolish. Clearly, it is to set a premium on treason."

"Then let Mr. Ferguson deal with him," Cassel answered, curtly. "He is his man, and it is his business. I don't lay a hand on him, and that is flat."

"Nor I! Nor I!" cried several, with eagerness. God knows if they thought in their hearts to curry favour with me.

"You are all mad!" Ferguson cried, beating the air.

"And you are a coward!" Cassel retorted. "I'd as soon trust him as you. If you are taken you'll

peach, Ferguson! G— —— you! I know you will. You will peach! You are as white-livered a cur as ever lived!"

Then, seeing them divided, and the most bloody-minded of them—for such Cassel had been a short time before—taking up my cause, I thought that for certain the bitterness of death was past; and I took courage, discerning for the first time solid land beyond the deeps and black suffocating fears through which I had passed. For the first time I allowed my thoughts to dwell on the future, and myself to hope and plan. But the warm current of returning life had scarcely coursed through my veins and set my heart beating, before Charnock's cold voice, taking up the tale, smote on my ear, and in a moment dashed my jubilation. There was that in his tone gripped my heart afresh.

"Peace, man," he said. "Peace! Is this a time to be bickering? Let us be clear before we separate, what is to be done with this man. For my part, I am not for letting him go."

"Nor I," said Smith, speaking almost for the first time.

The others, lately so hot and impassioned, looked at the speakers and at one another with a sort of apathy. Only Ferguson cried violently, "Nor I, by

——! Nor I. We are many, and what is one life?"

"Quite so, Mr. Ferguson," Charnock retorted. "But will you take the life?"

The plotter drew back as he had drawn back before. "It is everybody's business," he muttered.

"Then will you take part in it? You are the first to condemn. Will you be one to execute?"

Ferguson moistened his lips with his tongue, and, swallowing with an effort, looked shiftily at me and away again. The sweat stood on his face. For me, I watched him, fascinated; watched him, and still he did not answer.

"Just so," said Charnock, at last. "You will not. And that being so, is there anyone else who will? If not, what is to be done?"

"Put him in a lugger," Keyes cried, "at the bridge; and by morning——"

"He will be taken off at the Nore," Cassel answered scornfully. "And you too if you think to get off that way. There are more Billops in the Pool than the Billop who gave up Ashton."

"Gag him and leave him here."

"And have him found by the messengers to-morrow morning?" Cassel answered. "As well and better, call a chair, and pay the chairmen, and bid

them take him to the Secretary's office with our compliments."

"Well, if not here, in one of the other pens. Ferguson knows plenty."

The woman who had come in with Smith laughed. "That might answer," she said, "if his sweetheart were not here. Do you think she would leave him to starve?"

There was a general stir and muttering as the men turned to the girl. "Pooh," said one, "it is Ferguson's girl."

"And your spy's sweetheart," the woman repeated.

The girl lifted her head and showed the room a face pale, weary, and dull-eyed. "He is nothing to me," she said.

And the men would have believed her; but the woman, with a swift, cat-like movement, seized her wrist and held it. "Nothing to you, my girl, isn't he?" she cried. "Then you have the fever or the small-pox on you! One, two, three——"

Her face flaming, the girl sprang up and snatched away her hand.

The woman laughed—and how I hated her! "He is nothing to you, isn't he?" she said in a mocking tone. "Yet what will you not give me to save him,

my chick? What will you not give me to see him safe out of this house? What——?”

“Peace, peace!” cried Charnock. “Time is everything, and we are wasting it. Unless we would be taken, every man of us, we should be half-way to Romney Marsh by morning.”

“Will you leave him to me!” said Smith suddenly.

“Leave him?”

“Ay. Or better, let me have two minutes’ talk with him here, and if he comes to my way of thinking, I will answer for him.”

“Answer for him?” cried Ferguson, with a sneer. “If you answer for him no better than I did, you will give us small surety.”

“Ay, but I am not you, Mr. Ferguson,” Smith retorted, in a tone of contempt, whereat the older man writhed impotently.

“This person—Mr. Taylor or Mr. Price—or whatever his name is—knows me and that what I say I do.”

“Well, do—what you like with him,” Charnock answered peevishly, “so that you stop his mouth.”

To my great joy the other men assented in the same tone, being glad to be rid of the burden. It may seem strange to some that those who had prepared an hour before to take my life, should now be

as ready to let me go; but there are few men who are eager to take life in cold blood, and kill a man as they would a sheep. Moreover, in favour of these men—on whose memory the Assassination Plot has cast obloquy not altogether deserved, since few of them were assassins in the strict sense, and the worst of all, Ferguson, escaped his just fate—in their favour I say, it is to be observed that the fact which they designed, however horrid in the eyes of good citizens, and certainly not to be defended by me, was not in their sight so much a murder as an act of private warfare carried into the enemy's country. So fully I am persuaded was this the case, that had it been a question of stabbing the King in the back, or shooting him from a window, I believe not one would have volunteered. Let this stand to their credit: to the credit of men whom I saw and have described at their worst, drunken, reckless, ill-combined, and worse governed; whose illegal design had it been accomplished, must have postponed the Protestant succession in these realms; but who, misguided and betrayed as they were by leaders more evil than themselves, evinced some spark of chivalry in their lives—for all did it in a measure for a cause—and in their sufferings a fortitude that would have become better men and a nobler effort.

So much of them. One released my hands, and another at Smith's request found him a light; and my new protector bidding me follow him, and leading the way upstairs to the bare room at the back whence I had broken out, those we left were deep in muttered plans and whisperings of the Marsh, and Hunt's house, and Harrison's Inn at Dimchurch, before we were out of hearing.

Smith's first act, when we reached the room above, was to close the door upon us. This done, he set his candle on the floor—whence its flame threw dark wavering outlines of our figures on the ceiling—and moved to the hearth. Here, while I stared, wondering at his silence, he searched for some spring or handle, and finding it, caused a large piece of the wainscot to fall out and reveal a cavity about three feet deep and six long. He beckoned me to bring the candle and look in, and supposing it to be a secret way out, I did so. However, outlet there was none. The place was nothing more than a concealed cupboard.

“Well?” he said, when he had moved the candle to and fro that I might see the better—his face the while wearing a smile that caught and held my gaze. “Well? what do you think of it, Mr. Taylor?”

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I did not understand him, and I said so, trembling.

"It is a tolerable hiding-place?" said he.

I nodded; to please him I would have said it was a palace.

"And not a bad prison?"

I nodded again; staring at him, fascinated. I began to understand.

"And a grave?"

I shuddered. "What do you mean?" I muttered.

"Lay a man in there, bound hand and foot, and gagged; what would you find in a year's time, Mr. Price? Not much."

I stared at him.

"If they knew of that downstairs," he continued, stopping to snuff the candle with his fingers, then looking askance at me, "would they use it, I wonder? Would they use it? What do you think, Mr. Price?"

Again I made no answer.

"Shall I tell them?" said he easily.

"What—what do you want?" I whispered hoarsely.

"That is better," said he, nodding. "Well, to be candid, almost nothing. Two pledges. First, that you will give no evidence against anyone here. That of course."

I muttered assent. I was ready to promise anything.

“And secondly, that you will, when I call upon you, do me a little favour, Mr. Price. It is a small matter, a trifle I asked you at my lady’s house three days back. Promise to do that for me, as and when I demand performance, and in ten minutes from this time you shall leave the house, safe, free, and unhurt.”

“I promise,” I said eagerly. “I promise honestly!”

But even while I spoke—this seemed to be the strangest of all the things that had happened to me that night, that this man should think it worth while to pledge me under such circumstances, or value at a groat a promise so given. For the pledge was a pledge to do ill, and as soon as he and the other conspirators were laid by the heels or had fled the country, what sanction remained to bind me? I saw that as I spoke, and promised—and promised. And would have promised fifty times—with the reservation that I did so under force *majeure*. Who would not have done the same, being in my place?

But I suppose I answered too quickly to please him, and so he read my thoughts, or he had it in his mind from the first to read me a lesson, for the words were scarcely out of my mouth before he slid

his hand into his breast with the ugliest smile I ever saw on a man's face; and he signed to me to get into the cupboard. "Get in," he said, between his closed teeth; and then when, terrified by the change in him and the order, I began to back from it, "Get in!" he said, in a voice that set me shaking; "or take the consequences. Do you hear me? I am no Ferguson to threaten and no more."

I dared resist no longer, and I crawled in, trembling and praying him not to shut me in—not to shut me in.

"Lie down!" he said, gloating on me with cruel eyes, and his hand still in his breast.

I lay down, praying for mercy.

"On your back! On your back!" he continued. "And your hands by your sides. So! That is better. Now listen to me, Mr. Price, and think on what I say. When you want to be laid out for good as you are laid out now, when you are ready for your coffin and shroud—and the worms—then break your promise to me, for coffin and shroud and worms will be ready. Think of that—think of that and of me when the temptation comes. And hark you, you fancy," he went on, fixing his eyes on mine, "and you count on it, that I shall be taken with the others, or escaping shall be where you need not fear me.

Don't deceive yourself. If a week hence I am in prison, take that for a sign, and please yourself. But if I am free, obey, obey—or God help you!”

I know not how to describe with any approach to fidelity the peculiar effect which words apparently so simple had on me, or the terror, out of all proportion to the means chosen—for he spoke without oath, violence, or passion—into which they threw me, and which was very far from passing with the sound. I had feared Ferguson, but I feared this man more, a hundred times more! And yet I can give no reason, adduce no explanation, save that he spoke quietly, and so seemed to mean all and something beyond what he said. The plans for deceiving him and breaking my word which I had entertained a moment before melted into thinnest air while I lay and sweated in my narrow berth, not daring to move eye or limb until he gave me leave.

And he, as if he knew how fear of him grew on me under his gaze—or in sheer cruelty, I know not which—kept me there, and sat smiling and smiling at me (as the devil may smile at some dead man passed beyond redemption)—kept me there God knows how long. But so long, and to such purpose, that when at length he bade me rise, and looking closely into my face, nodded, and told me I might

go—nay, later than that, when he had led me downstairs and opened the door for me, and supported me through it—for in the cold air I staggered like a drunken man—even then, I say, so heavy was the spell of fear laid on me, and such his power, I dared not move or stir until he had twice—smiling the second time—bidden me go. “Go, man,” said he, “you are free. But remember!”

CHAPTER VI.

FEW men are condemned to such an ordeal as that through which I had passed; and though some who read this, and are as remote from death as the wife, that may be any day, and must be one day, is from the young bachelor—though some, I say, and in particular those who never saw blade drawn in anger in their lives, but have done all their fighting in the cock-pit, may think that I carried it poorly in the circumstances, and with none of the front and bravado suitable to the occasion, I would have them remember the old saying, *Ne sutor supra crepidam*, and ask of a scholar only a scholar's work. I would have them remember that in the shadow of the scaffold, even a man so gallant by repute as the Lord Preston of that day, stooped to be an evidence; and that in the same situation the family pride of Richard Hampden availed as little as the reckless courage of Monmouth, or the effrontery of Sir John Fenwick, to raise its owner above the common level.

Simpliciter, it is one thing to vapour at the Cocoa-

tree among wits and beaux, and another to take the hazard when the time comes, as no less a person than my Lord Bolingbroke discovered, and that no farther back than '14. I would have large talkers to remember this. For myself I am content that I came through the trial with my life; and yet, not with so much of that either, that anything surer than instinct guided my steps when all was over to the Duke's home in St. James's Square, where arriving, speechless and helpless, it was wonderful I was not put to the door without more. Fortunately, my lord, marvelling at my failure to return before, and mindful, even in the turmoil of that evening, of the service I had done him in the day, had given orders in my behalf; and on my arrival I was recognised, half dead as I was, and taken to the steward's room, and being let blood by a surgeon who was hastily called in, was put to bed, all who saw me supposing that I was suffering from vertigo, or some injury, though no marks of blows on the head could be discovered.

That was a night long remembered in London. Messengers with lights, attended by files of soldiers, were every hour passing through the streets, searching houses and arresting the suspected. From mouth to mouth rumours of the conspiracy flew abroad; at nine o'clock it was stated, and generally believed,

that the King was wounded; at ten that he had been seized; later that he was dead. Early in the evening the draw-bridge at the Tower was drawn, and the sentries were doubled; the City gates were closed and guarded; a whole battalion stood all night under arms at Kensington; the Council was in perpetual sitting; many houses were lighted from eve to dawn; nor since the great panic of Beachy Head in '90 had there been an alarm so deep or widespread.

If this was so in the city generally, at the Secretary's residence, whither many of the prisoners were brought for examination as soon as they were taken, the excitement was at its height. The Square outside, then unenclosed, was occupied all night by successive groups of sight-seers, or of persons more nearly interested in the event. One consequence of this was that, with all this astir without, my case attracted the less notice within; and, unheeded and almost forgotten—which, perhaps, was the better for me—I was left in peace to sleep off the shock and fright I had experienced, of which the severity may be gauged by the fact that the afternoon of the next day was well advanced before I awoke, and finding myself in bed in a strange room, with cold broth and a little wine standing on a stool at my elbow, sat up, and looked round me in amazement. The steep slope of

the ceiling towards the window, and the heavy flattened eaves which projected over the latter, soon apprised me that I lay under the leads of a great house; but this was the extent of my knowledge. However, my stomach presently called for food, and I took it; and my head ceasing to swim, I began to recall what had happened to me; and rising, and going to the window, I recognised the great and fashionable Square on which my window looked. At that and the thoughts of what I had gone through, and the danger I had escaped, I fell to quaking again, and for a moment the dizziness returned. But presently, the cheerful aspect of the room much aiding me, I recovered myself, and dressing, and finishing the food, I prepared to descend.

No need to say that I wondered much at all I saw, and particularly at the handsome and stately proportions of the staircase, which I descended without seeing any person until I reached the landing on the first floor. Here, looking timidly over the balustrade, I discovered that the buzz and hum of voices which I had heard as soon as I opened my door, came from the hall below, which appeared to be paved with heads. First and nearest to where I stood were clustered on the lower steps of the staircase a number of persons whom I took to be servants, and

who, standing as if in the boxes of a theatre, were taken up with staring at what went on on the floor below them, and particularly at a row of eight or nine men, who, seated on chairs along one side of the hall, seemed to be in the charge of a messenger and some tipstaves, and to be prisoners awaiting examination. Between these last and the stairs occupying the floor of the hall, and both moving and standing still, were a crowd of persons of condition, the greater part, to all appearance, clients of the Duke, or officers and persons who, having the *entrée*, had stepped in out of curiosity to see the sight.

However, I had no eyes for these, for with a beating heart I recognised among the dejected prisoners seated along the wall, four whom I knew, King, Keyes, Cassel, and Ferguson himself, and I had anything but a mind to stay to be recognised in my turn. I was in the act of withdrawing, therefore, as quietly as I could, when I saw with a kind of shock that the prisoner at the end of the row, the one nearest to me and farthest from the door was a girl. It scarcely needed a second glance to tell me that the girl was Mary. The light at that inner extremity of the hall was waning, and her face, always pale and now in shadow, wore an aspect of grey and weary depression that, natural as it was under the circum-

stances, went to my heart, and impressed me deeply in proportion as I had always found her hard and self-reliant. But moved as I was, I dared not linger, since to linger might be to be observed. With a light foot, therefore, I carried out my first intention, and drawing back undiscovered, sneaked up the staircase to my room.

My clue in the circumstances was clear. Plainly it was to lie close and keep quiet and shun observation until the crisis was passed; then by every means in my power—saving always the becoming an evidence in court, which was too dangerous—to deserve the Duke's favour; and as to the pledge I had given to Smith, to be guided by the future.

Such a line of conduct was immensely favoured by the illness to which I had so fortunately succumbed. Once back in my bed, I had only to lie there, and affect weakness; and in a day or two I might hope that things would be so far advanced that my share in them and knowledge of them would go for little, and I, on the ground of the personal service I had done his Grace, might keep his favour—yet run no risk.

In fact nothing could seem more simple than such a line of conduct; on which, the western daylight that still lingered in the room, giving my retreat a most

cheerful aspect, I felt that I had every reason to hug myself. After the miseries and dangers of the past week I was indeed well off. Here, in the remote top floor of my lord's great house in the Square, I was as safe as I could be anywhere in the world, and I knew it.

But so contrary is human nature, and so little subject to the dictations of the soundest sense, that I had not lain in my bed five minutes, congratulating myself on my safety, before the girl, and the wretchedness I had read in her face, began to trouble me. It was not to be denied that she had gone some way towards saving my life—if she had not actually saved it; and I had a kind of feeling for her on that account. True, things were greatly altered since we had agreed to go to Romford together, *et nuptias facere*; I had got no patron then, nor such prospects as I now had, these troubles once overpast. But for all that, it troubled me to think of her as I had seen her, pale and downcast; and by-and-by I found myself again at the door of my room with my hand on the latch. Thence I went back, shivering and ashamed, and calling myself and doubtless rightly a fool; and tried, by watching the crowd in the Square—but timidly, since even at that height I fancied I might be recognised—to divert my thoughts. With so little

success in the end, however, that presently I was stealing down the stairs again.

I knew that it was impossible I could pass down the main staircase and through the servants unobserved, but I took it that in such a house there must be a backstairs; and coming to the first floor I turned craftily down the main corridor leading into the heart of the house, and pretty quickly found that staircase—which was as good as dark—and crept down it still meeting no one; a thing that surprised me until I stood in the long passage on the ground floor corresponding with the corridor above, and found that the door, which from its position should cut it off from the front hall, was fastened. Tantalised by the murmur of voices in the hall, and my proximity, I tried the lock twice; but the second effort only confirming the result of the first, I was letting down the latch as softly as I could, hoping that I should not be detected, when the door was sharply flung open in my face, all the noise and heat of the hall burst on me, and in the opening appeared a stout angry man, who glared at me as if he would eat me.

“What are you doing here?” he cried, “when twice I have told you——” There he stopped, seeing who it was, and “Hallo!” he continued in a different

and more civil tone, "it is you, is it? Are you better?"

Afterwards I learned that he was Mr. Martin, my lord's house-steward, but at the time I knew him only for someone in authority; and I muttered an excuse. "Well, come through, now you are here," he continued sharply. "But the orders are strict that this door be kept locked while this business is going. You can see as well, or better, from the stairs. There, those are the men. And a rare set of Frenchified devils they look! Charnock is in with my lord now, and I hope he may not blow him up with gunpowder or some fiendish trick."

He had scarcely told me when, a stir in the body of the hall announcing a new arrival, a cry was raised of "Room for my Lord Marlborough and my Lord Godolphin!" and the press falling to either side out of respect, I had a glimpse of two gentlemen in the act of entering; one, a stout and very noble-looking man of florid complexion, the other stout also and personable, but a trifle smug and solemn. The steward had no sooner heard their names announced, than in a great fluster he bade me keep the door a minute; and pushing himself into the throng, he went with immense importance to receive them.

So by a strange piece of luck at the moment that

the check of his presence was withdrawn, I found myself standing within three feet of the girl, whose seat was close to the door; moreover, the movement, by thrusting those who had before occupied the floor back upon the line of prisoners, had walled us in, as it were, from observation. Under these circumstances our eyes met, and I looked for a flush of joy and surprise, a cry of recognition at least; but though Mary started, and for an instant stared at me wide-eyed, her gaze fell the next moment, and muttering something inaudible, she let her chin sink back on her breast."

I did not remember that she, supposing I had informed, and ignorant of the scene which had bound me to the Duke of Shrewsbury, would see nothing surprising in my presence in his house, and more deeply wounded than I can now believe possible by her demeanour, I bent over her.

"Don't you know me?" I whispered. "Mary!"

She shivered, but retained the same attitude, her eyes on the floor.

"Can I do anything for you?" I persisted; but this time I spoke more coldly; her silence began to annoy me.

She looked up then with a wan smile; and, with

lips so dry that they scarcely performed their office, spoke. "You can let me escape," she said.

"That is impossible," I answered promptly—to put an end to such notions. And then to comfort her, "Besides, what can they do to you!" I said confidently. "Nothing! You are not a man, and they do not burn women for treason now, unless it is for coining. Cheer up! They——"

"They will send me to the Compter—and whip me," she muttered, shuddering so suddenly and violently that the chair creaked under her. And then, "If you can get me away," she continued, moistening her lips and speaking with her eyes averted, "Well! But if not you had better leave me. You do me no good," she added, after a slight pause, and with a sob of impatience in her voice.

I knew that it was not unlikely that the House of Correction would be her fate; and that such a fate, even to a decent woman—and she was a girl!—might be less tolerable than death. And I felt something of the horror and lurking apprehension that parched her mouth and strained her eyes. The hall was growing dark round us, and the throng of persons of all sorts that filled it, poisoning the air with their breathing and the odour of their clothes, I experienced an astonishing loathing of the confine-

ment and the place. I saw this the beginning of the dreary road which she had to travel; and my heart revolting with the pity of it, and the future of it, I fell into a passion, and did a thing I very seldom did. I swore.

And then—heaven knows how I went on to a thing so unwise and reckless, and in every way so unlike me! Certainly it was not the mere opportunity tempted me—though a chance more favourable, the general attention being completely engrossed by the two noblemen, could not have been conceived—yet it was certainly not that, I say, for I did it on the impulse of the moment, in sheer blind terror, not looking to see whether I were watched or not. Nor did it arise from any farther suggestion on the girl's part. In fact, all I remember of it is that, in a paroxysm of pity, feeling rather than seeing that the people round us completely hid us, I touched the girl's shoulder, and that she looked up with a wild look in her eyes—and that determined me. So that without thinking I unlocked the door in a trembling, fumbling sort of manner, and passed her through it, and followed her, no one except Cassel, the prisoner who sat next her, being the wiser. Had I been prudent, or acted under anything but the impulse of the moment, I should have let her go through, and

trusting to her woman's wits to get her clear of the house, have remained on guard myself as if nothing had happened; and certainly this would have been the safer way, since I could have sworn, when I was challenged, that no one had passed through the door. But I had not the nerve to think of this or remain, and I went with her.

The thing once done, my first thought, and the natural, if foolish, impulse on which I acted was to take her to my room, hers to follow where I led. The passage beyond the door was dark, but taking no thought of slip or stumble, in a moment I had her up the small staircase which led to the first floor, and through the door at the head of the flight into the long corridor, which, spacious, lofty, and comparatively light—in every way the strangest opposite to the crowded hall below—ran from the well of the great staircase into the depths of the house. By involving her in this upper part of the house, whence escape was impossible, and where prolonged search must inevitably discover her, I was really doing a most foolish thing. But in the event it mattered nothing, for as we reached the corridor, and paused to cast a wary glance down its length this way and that—I, for my part, shaking like an aspen, and I doubt not as white as a sheet—a single footstep rang

on the marble floor that edged the matting of the passage, and the next moment the Duke himself, issuing from a doorway no more than five paces away, came plump upon us.

The surprise was so complete that we had no time to move, and we stood as if turned to stone. Yet even then, if I had retained perfect presence of mind, and bethought me that he might not know the girl, and would probably deem her one of his household—a still-room maid or a seamstress—all might have been well. For though he did, in fact, know the girl, having questioned her not half an hour before, it was on me that his eye alighted; and his first words were proof that he suspected nothing.

“Are you better?” he said, pausing with the kindness and consideration that so well became him—nay, that became no other man so well. “I am glad to see that you are about. We shall want you presently. What was it?”

And then, if I had answered him at once, I have no doubt that he would have passed on; but my teeth chattered so pitiably that I could only gape at him; and on that, seeing in a moment that something was wrong, he looked at my companion, and recognised her. I saw his eyes open wide with astonishment, and his mouth grew stern. Then,

"But what—what, sir, is this?" he cried. "And what do you——"

He said no more, for as he reached that word the door beside me opened gently, and a man slid round it, looked, saw the Duke, and stood, his mouth agape, a stifled oath on his lips. It was Cassel, his hands shackled.

At this fresh appearance the Duke's astonishment may be imagined, and could scarcely be exceeded. He stared at the door as if he questioned who still remained behind it, or who might be the next to issue from it. But then, seeing, I suppose, something whimsical and bizarre in the situation—which there certainly was, though at the time I was far from discerning it—and being a man who, in all circumstances, retained a natural dignity, he smiled; and recovering himself before any one of us, took a tone between the grave and ironical. "Mr. Cassel?" he said. "Unless my eyes deceive me? The gentleman I saw a few minutes ago?"

"The same," the conspirator answered jauntily; but his anxious eyes roving beside and behind the Duke belied his tone.

"Then, perhaps," my lord answered, taking out his snuff-box, and tapping it with a good-humoured air, "you will see, sir, that your presence here

needs some explanation?" May I ask how you came here?"

"The devil I know or care, your Grace!" Cassel answered. "Except that I came into your house with no good-will, and if I could have found the door should not have outstayed my welcome."

"I believe it," said my lord drily, "if I believe nothing else. But you have lost the throw. And that being so, may I beg that you will descend again? I am loth to use force in my own house, Mr. Cassel, and to call the servants would prejudice your case. If you are wise, therefore, I think that you will see the wisdom of retiring quietly."

"Have no fear, I will go," the man answered with sufficient coolness. "I should not have come up, but that I saw that Square-toes there smuggle out the girl, and as no one was looking it seemed natural to follow."

"Oh!" said the Duke, flashing a glance at me that loosened my knee-joints. "He smuggled her out, did he?"

"He could not do much less," the conspirator answered. "She saved his life yesterday."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, when Ferguson would have hung him like a dog! And not far wrong either! But mum! I am

talking. And save him or no, I did not think the creature had the spunk to do the thing. No, I did not."

"Ah!" said my lord, looking at him attentively.

"No, and as for the wench, your Grace——" and with the word Cassel dropped his voice, "she is no more than a child. You have enough. It is all over. *Sacré nom de Dieu*, let her go, my lord. Let the girl go."

The Duke raised his eyebrows. "I see no girl," said he, slowly. "Of whom are you talking, Mr. Cassel?"

I do not know who was more astonished at that, Cassel or I. True, the girl was gone; for a moment before, the Duke's back being half-turned, she had slipped into a doorway a couple of paces away, and there I could hear her breathing even now. But that my lord had failed to detect the movement I could no more believe than that he had failed to see the girl two minutes before, when, as clearly as I ever saw anything in my life, I had seen him examine her features.

Nevertheless, "I see no girl," he repeated coolly. "But I see you, Mr. Cassel; and as the alarm may be given at any moment, and I do not choose to be found with you, I must beg of you to descend at

once. Do you, sir," he continued, addressing me sharply, "go with him, and when you have taken him back to the hall bring me the key of the door."

"Well, I am d——d!" said Cassel.

For the first time the Duke betrayed signs of anger. "Go, sir"; he said. "And do you"—this to me—"bring me the key of that door."

Cassel turned as if to go; then with difficulty lifting his hands to his head, he took off his hat. "My lord," he said, "you are well called the King of Hearts. For a Whig you are a d——d good fellow!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT was preparing, or what my lord intended by conduct so extraordinary I had no time to consider. For though I got Cassel into the hall again undetected—which was of itself a marvel—when it came to taking the key from the lock my hand shook so violently with fear and excitement that the first attempt failed. Before I had succeeded the steward bustled up through the crowd, and seeing what I was about, bade me desist with some roughness.

“Do you want an escape that way?” said he, bursting with importance. “Leave it to me. Here, hands off, man.” And he drew me into the hall and locked the door.

So there I was, fixed as it were in the girl’s empty place, with Cassel grinning at me on one side and the steward grumbling on the other, and the crowd so thick about us that it was impossible for me to budge an inch. It amazed me that the girl’s absence had not yet been noticed, but I knew that in no short time it must be, and my misery was in

proportion. Presently "Hallo," cried the steward, peeping first on one side of me and then on the other. "Where is that slut that was here?"

"In with your master," said Cassel coolly.

"But Charnock is with him."

"Well, I suppose he can have two at a time if he pleases, Mr. Pudding-head! Thousand devils! Are we going to be kept in this crowd all night?"

The steward sniffed his indignation, but the answer satisfied him for the time; and the messengers and tipstaves being engaged at the farther end of the hall in shepherding their prisoners on the side of the house-door, and being crowded upon besides by gentlemen whom they feared to offend, had no notion of what had happened or that their tale was not complete. Someone had lowered and lighted a round lanthorn that hung in the middle of the hall; but the light hanging low, and being intercepted by the heads of those before us, barely reached the corner in which I stood. Still I knew that this was but a respite, and my relief and joy were great, when a cry of "Price! Price!" was raised, and "Price! Who is he? His Grace wants Price!" passing from lip to lip, the steward thrust me forward, and called to the nearest to make a way for

me; and this being done I was speedily passed through the crowd to a door at the farther side of the hall, where two servants who stood on guard there, having satisfied themselves that I was the man, I was admitted.

I knew that I was not yet out of the wood. Moreover I had cause to doubt how I now stood in the Duke's favour, or what might be his intentions towards me. But at least I had escaped from the hall and from the steward whom I had begun to regard with a mixture of fear and hatred; and I prepared to face the ordeal before me with a courage that now seems astonishing. However, for the moment my courage was not to be proved. The room in which I found myself was large and lofty, lined for the most part with books, and adorned with marble busts, that gleamed ghostly in the obscured corners, or stood out bright and white where the radiance of the candles fell on them. In the middle of the rich dark carpet that covered the floor stood a table, furnished with papers, pens, and books; and this, with three inquisitorial chairs, set along the farther side of it, had a formidable air. But the three persons for whose accommodation the chairs had been placed, were now on their feet, standing in a group before the hearth, and so deeply engrossed in the

subject under discussion that, if they were aware of my entrance, they took no notice of it.

The Earl of Marlborough, the more handsome and courtly of the two noblemen whom I had seen pass through the hall, a man even then of a great and splendid presence and address, though not what he afterwards became, was speaking, when finding myself unheeded, I gathered my wits to listen. "I have no right to give advice, your Grace," he was saying in suave and courtly accents. "But I think you will be ill-advised if you pay much attention to what these rogues allege, or make it public."

"No man will be safe!" urged his companion, with, it seemed to me, a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Better hang them out of hand," responded the Earl blandly. And he took snuff and delicately dusted his upper lip.

"Yet I do not know," answered the Duke, who stood between the two with his eyes on the fire, and his back towards me. "If we go too fast, people may say, my lord, that we fear what they might disclose."

The Earl laughed blandly. "You had little gain by Preston," said he, "and you kept him long enough."

"My Lord Devonshire is anxious to go into the matter thoroughly."

"Doubtless he has his reasons," Lord Marlborough answered, shrugging his shoulders. "The question is—whether your Grace has the same."

"I know none why we should *not* go into it," the Duke answered in measured tones which showed pretty clearly that in spite of his good-nature he was not to be led blindfold. "They can have nothing to say that will reflect on me. And I am sure," he continued, slightly inclining his head in courteous fashion, "that the same may be said of Lord Marlborough."

"*Cela va sans dire!*" answered the Earl in a voice so unconstrained and with a gesture so proud and easy that if he lied—as some have been found ready to assert—he showed a mastery of that art alike amazing and incredible. "And of Lord Godolphin also."

"By God, yes!" that peer exclaimed, in such a hurry to assent that his words tumbled over one another.

"Just so. I say so, my lord," the Earl repeated with a faint ring of scorn in his tone, while Lord Godolphin wiped his forehead. "But innocence is no shield against calumny, and if these rogues can

prolong their lives by a lie, do you think that they will not tell one? Or even ten?"

"Ay, by God, will they!" cried Godolphin. "Or twenty. "I'll lay thee long odds to that."

My lord bowed and admitted that it was possible.

"So possible," Lord Marlborough continued, lightly and pleasantly, "that it is not long since your Grace, unless I am mistaken, suffered after that very fashion. I have no mind to probe your secrets, Duke—God forbid! I leave such tasks to my Lord Portland! But, unless I am in error, when you last left office advantage was taken of some"—he paused, and then with an easy motion of his white hands—"some trifling indiscretion. It was exaggerated and increased tenfold, and placed in a light so false that"—he paused again to take a pinch of snuff from his box—"that for a time even the King was induced to believe—that my Lord Shrewsbury was corresponding with France. Most amusing!"

The Duke did not answer for a moment; then in a voice that shook a little, "It is an age of false witnesses," he said.

"Precisely," Lord Marlborough answered, shrugging his shoulders with charming *bonhomie*. "That is what I say. They do not greatly hurt you or me.

We have clear consciences and clean hands; and can defy these ruffians. But the party must be considered."

"There is something in that," said the Duke, nodding and speaking in his natural tone.

"And smaller men, as innocent, but more vulnerable—they too should be considered."

"True," said Lord Godolphin, nodding. "True, by God."

The Duke assented thoughtfully. "I will bear it in mind," he said. "I think it is a questionable policy."

"In any event I am sure that your Grace's prudence will steer the matter to a safe issue," Lord Marlborough answered in his courtliest fashion. "I thank Heaven that you are here in this emergency, and not Portland or Auverquerque, who see a foe to the King in every Englishman."

"I should be sorry to see any but an Englishman in the Secretary's office," the Duke said, with a little heat.

"And yet that is what we have to expect," Lord Marlborough answered placidly. "But we are detaining your Grace. Come, my lord, we must be going. I suppose that Sir John is not taken?"

"Sir John Fenwick?"

"Yes."

"It has not been reported."

With that the two noblemen took a formal farewell, and the Duke begging them to go out by his private door that they might avoid the press in the hall, they were crossing the room in that direction, when a sudden hubbub arose outside and a cry of alarm, and before they had more than raised their eyebrows, asking one another politely what it meant, the door beside which I stood was opened, and a gentleman came in. He looked with a flustered face at the Duke. "Your Grace's pardon," he said hurriedly. "One of the prisoners has escaped!"

"Escaped!" said the Duke. "How?"

"The woman has somehow slipped away. Through the crowd it is believed, your Grace. The messenger——"

But at that moment the unfortunate official himself appeared in the doorway, looking scared out of his life. "What is this?" said the Duke sharply.

The man whimpered. "'Fore God it is not my fault," he cried. "She never passed through the door! May I die if she did, your Grace."

"She may be still in the hall?"

"We have searched it through and through!" the man answered desperately. "It remains only

to search the house, your Grace—with your permission.”

“What!” the Duke cried, really or apparently startled. “Why the house?”

“She must have slipped into the house, for she never went out!” the man answered doggedly. “She never went out!”

The Duke shrugged his shoulders and turned to Lord Marlborough. “What do you think?” said he.

The Earl raised his eyebrows. By this time half the concourse in the hall had pressed to the doorway, and were staring into the room. “Call Martin,” said the Duke. “And stand back there a little, if you please,” he continued haughtily. “This is no public court, but my house, good people.”

It seemed to me—but I, behind the door, was in a boundless fright—that the steward would never come. He did come at last, and pushing his way through the crowd, presented himself with a bustling confidence that failed to hide his apprehensions. Nor was the Duke’s reception of him calculated to set him at his ease.

“Stand out, man!” he said harshly, and with a nearer approach to the tyrannical than I had hitherto seen in a man, who was perhaps the best-natured of his species. “Stand out and answer me, and no

evasions. Did I not give you an order of the strictest character, to lock the inner door and leave it for nothing, and no one—while this business was forward?”

Martin gasped. “May it please your Grace,” he said, “I——”

“Answer, fool, what I ask,” the Duke cried, cutting him short with the utmost asperity. “Did I not give you those orders?”

The man was astonished, and utterly terrified. “Yes,” he said. “It is true, your Grace.”

“And did you obey them?”

Poor Martin, seeing that all the trouble was like to rest on his back, answered as in all probability the Duke expected. “I did, your Grace,” he said roundly. “I have not been an arm’s length from the door, nor has it been unlocked. I have the key here,” he continued, producing it and holding it up.

“Has anyone passed through the door while you have been on guard?”

The steward had gone too far to confess the truth now, and swore positively and repeatedly that no one had passed through the door or could have passed through the door; that it was impossible; that the door had been locked all the time, and the key

in his possession: finally, that if the girl had gone through the door she must have gone through the keyhole, and was a witch. At which some present crossed themselves.

"I am satisfied," said the Duke, addressing the messenger. "Doubtless she slipped through the crowd. But as you are responsible and will have to answer for the girl, I would advise you to lose no time in searching such of Mr. Ferguson's haunts as are known to you. It is probable that she will take refuge in one or other of them. However, I will report the matter as favourably as I can to the council. You can go. Lodge the others according to the warrants, and make no second blunder. See these people out, Martin. And for you, my lords, I am sorry that this matter has detained you."

"*La fille—ne valait pas beaucoup?*" said the Earl curiously.

"*Pas de tout!*" my lord answered, and smiling, shrugged his shoulders. "*Rien!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH the least inclination towards merriment I must have laughed at the face of horror with which Mr. Martin, when he went a few minutes later, to expel the last stragglers, came on me where I stood, trying to efface myself behind the door. He dared not speak, for the Duke was standing at the table a few paces from him; and I would not budge. Fortunately I remembered that a still tongue was all he need wish; and I laid my finger on my lips and nodded to him. This a little encouraged him, but not much; and in his fear of what I might, in spite of my promise, let out, if I were left alone with his master, he was still in two minds whether he should eject me or not, when the Duke spoke.

"Is Price there?" he said with his face averted, and his hands still busy with the papers. "The man I sent for."

"Yes, your Grace," Martin answered, making hideous faces at me.

"Then leave us. Shut the door."

If my lord had spoken the moment that was done and we were alone, I think it would have relieved me. But he continued to search among the papers on the table, and left me to sink under the weight of the stately room with its ordered rows of books, its ticking dial, and the mute busts of the great dead. The Duke's cloak lay across a chair, his embroidered star glittering on the breast; his sword and despatch-box were on another chair; and a thing that I took to be the signet gleamed among the papers on the table. From the lofty mantel-piece of veined marble that, supported by huge rampant dogs, towered high above me (the work as I learned afterwards of the great Inigo Jones), the portrait of a man in armour, with a warden in his mailed hand, frowned down on me, and the stillness continuing unbroken, and all the things I saw speaking to me gravely and weightily, of a world hitherto unknown to me—a world wherein the foot exchanged the thick pile of carpets for the sounding tread of Parian, and orders were obeyed unspoken, and sable-vested servants went to and fro at a sign—a world of old traditions, old observances, and old customs revolving round this man still young, I felt my spirits sink—the distance was so great from the sphere I had known hitherto. Every moment the silence grew

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more oppressive, the ticking of the clock more monotonous; it was an immense relief when the Duke suddenly spoke, and addressing me in his ordinary tone, "You can write?" said he.

"Yes, your Grace."

"Then sit here," he replied, indicating a seat at the end of the table, "and write what I shall tell you."

And before I could marvel at the ease of the transition, I was seated, quietly writing; what I can no longer remember, for it was the first only of many hundred papers, of private and public importance, which I was privileged to write for his signature. My hand shook, and it is unlikely that I exhibited much of the natural capacity for such work which it has been my lot to manifest since; nevertheless, his Grace after glancing over it, was pleased to express his satisfaction. "You learned to do this with Brome?" said he.

"Yes, your Grace."

"Then now," he continued, seating himself—I had risen respectfully—"Tell me what happened to you yesterday."

I had no choice but to obey, but before I told my story, seeing that he was in a good humour and so favourably inclined to me, I spoke out what was

in my mind; and in the most moving terms possible I conjured him to promise me that I should not be forced to be an evidence. I would tell him all, I would be faithful and true to him, and ask nothing better than to be his servant—but be an informer in court I dared not.

“You dare not?” he said, with an odd look at me. “And why not, man?”

But all I could answer was, “I dare not!”

“Are you afraid of these villains?” he continued, impatiently. “I tell you, we have them: it is they who have to fear!”

But I still clung to my point. I would tell, but I would give no evidence; I dared not.

“I am afraid, Mr. Price,” he said at that, and with an air of some contempt, “that you are something of a coward!”

I answered, grovelling before him, that it might be—it might be; but——

“But—who of us is not?” he answered, with a sudden gesture between scorn and self-reproof. “Do you mean that, man?” And he fixed his eyes on me. “Well, it is true. Who of us is not?” he repeated, slowly; and turning from me, he began to pace the room, his hands clasped behind him; so that before he had made a single turn it was easy

to see that he had forgotten my presence. "Who of us is not afraid—if not of these scoundrels, still of the future, of the return, of *Jacobus iracundus et ingens*, of another 29th of May? To be safe now and to be safe then—who is not thinking of that and living for that, and planning for that?"

He was silent a moment, then with something of anger in his voice, "My Lord Marlborough, dipped to the lips in '88, who shall say that for all that he has not made his peace? And has good reason to urge us to let sleeping dogs lie? And Godolphin, is it only at Newmarket he has hedged—that he says, the less we go into this the better? And Sunderland who trusts no one and whom no one trusts? And Leeds—all things for power? And Clarendon, once pardoned? And Russell, all temper? Who knows what pledges they have given, or may give? Devonshire—Devonshire only has to lose, and stands to lose with me. With me!"

As he spoke thus he seemed to be so human, and through the robe of state and stateliness in which he lived the beating of the poor human heart was so plainly visible, that my heart went out to him, and with an eagerness and boldness that now surprise me, I spoke to him.

"But, your Grace," I said, "while the King lives

all goes well, and were anything to happen to him——”

“Yes?” said he, staring at me, and no little astonished at the interruption.

“There is the Princess Anne. She is here, she would succeed, and——”

“And my Lord Marlborough!” said he, smiling. “Well, it may be. But who taught you politics, Mr. Price?”

“Mr. Brome,” said I, abashed. “What I know, your Grace.”

“Ha! I keep forgetting,” he answered, gaily, “that I am talking to one of the makers of opinion—the formers of taste. But there, you shall be no evidence, I give you my word. So tell me all you know, and what befell you yesterday.”

I had no desire but to do so—on those terms, and one small matter excepted—and not only to do that, but all things that could serve him. Nevertheless, and though I had high hopes of what I might get by his grace and favour, I was far from understanding that that was the beginning of twenty years of faithful labour at his side; of a matter of fifteen thousand papers written under his eye; of whole ledgers made up, of estate accompts balanced and tallies collected; of many winters and summers spent

among his books, either in the placid shades of Eyford or in the dignified quiet of St. James's Square. But, as I have said, though I did not foresee all this, I hoped much, and more as, my tale proceeding, my lord's generous emotion became evident. When I had done, he said many kind things to me respecting the peril I had escaped; and adding to their value by his manner of saying them, and by the charm which no other so perfectly possessed, he left me at last no resource but to quit the room in tears.

Treated thus with a kindness as much above my deserts as it was admirable in one of his transcendent rank, and assured, moreover, by my lord's own mouth that henceforth, in gratitude for the service I had done him in Ferguson's room, he would provide for me, I should have stood, I ought to have stood, in the seventh heaven of felicity. But as suffering moves unerring on the track of weakness, and no man enjoys at any moment perfect bliss, I had first to learn the fate of the girl whose evasion I had contrived. And when a cautious search and questions as crafty had satisfied me that she had really effected her escape from the house—probably in a man's dress, for one of the lacqueys complained of the loss of a suit of clothes—I had still a care; and a

care which gnawed more sharply with every hour of ease and safety.

Needless to say, the one matter on which I had been reticent, the one actor whose presence on the scene I had not disclosed to my lord, lay at the bottom of my anxiety. Kind in action and generous in intention as the Duke had shown himself, his magnanimity had not availed to oust from my mind the terror with which Smith's threats had imbued it; nor while confessing all else had I been able to bring myself to denounce the conspirator or detail the terms on which he had set me free. Though I had all the inducement to speak, which the certainty that his arrest would release me, could present, even this, and the security of the haven in which I lay, failed to encourage me to the point of hazard. So strong was the hold on my fears which this man had compassed; and so complete the slavery to which he had reduced my will.

But though at the time of confession, I found it a relief to be silent about him, this same silence presently left me alone to cope with him, and with fears sufficiently poignant, which his memory awakened: the result being that with prospects more favourable and a future better assured than I had ever imagined

would be mine, or than any man of my condition had a right to expect, I still found this drop of poison in my cup. It was not enough that all things—and my patron—favouring me, I sank easily into the position of his privy clerk, that I retained that excellent room in which I had first been placed, that I found myself accepted by the household as a fact—so that never a man saved from drowning by a strand had a right to praise his fortune as I had; nor that, the wind from every quarter, seeming at the same time to abate, the prisoners went for trial, and nothing said of me, while Ferguson, of whose complicity no legal proof could be found, lay in prison under the suspension of the Habeas Corpus, and kept silence; nor even that a note came from Mary, ostensibly from Dunkirk, and without compromising me informed me of her safety. It was not enough, I say, that each and all of these things happened beyond my hopes; for in the midst of my prosperity, whether I stood writing at my lord's elbow in the stillness of the stately library, or moved at ease through the corridor, greeted with respect by my fellow-servants, and with civility by all, I was alike haunted by the thought and terror of Smith, and the knowledge that at any moment, the conspirator might appear to hurl me from this paradise. The secrecy which I had

maintained about him doubled his power; even as the ease and luxury in which I lived presented in darker and fouler colours the sordid scenes and perils through which I had waded to this eminence.

CHAPTER IX.

I THINK that I had spent a week, or it might be more, in this situation of mingled ease and torment, when on coming down one morning after a haggard night I heard a stir in the hall; and, going that way to learn what it meant, met the servants returning in a crowd from the front, and talking low about something. Martin, who was foremost, cried, "Ha, you are too late!" And then drawing me aside, into a little den he had beside the passage, "They have taken him to the office," he said. "But, lord's sakes, Mr. Price," he continued, lifting his eyebrows and pursing up his lips to express his astonishment, "who would have thought it? Her ladyship will be in a taking! I hope that there may be no more in it than appears!"

"In what?" said I.

"In this arrest," he answered, eyeing me with meaning, and then softly closing the door on us. "I hope it may end there. That is all I say! Between ourselves."

"You forget," I cried with irritation, "that I know nothing about it! What arrest? And who is arrested?"

"Mr. Bridges's man of business."

"What Mr. Bridges?" I cried.

"Lord, Mr. Price, have you no wits?" he answered, staring at me. "My lord's mother's husband. The Countess's, to be sure! You must know Mr. Smith."

It needed no more than that; although, without the name, we might have gone on at cross purposes for an hour. But the name—the world held only one Smith for me, and he it seemed was arrested.

He was arrested! It was with the greatest difficulty that I could control my joy. Fortunately the little cub, where we stood, was ill-lighted, and Martin, a man too much taken up with his own consequence to be over-observant of his companions. Still, for a moment, I was perfectly overcome, the effervescence of my spirits such that I could do nothing but lean against the wall of the room, my heart bounding with joy and my head singing a pæan of jubilation. Smith was taken! Smith was in the hands of justice! Smith was arrested and I was free.

The first rapture past, however, I began to doubt; partly because the news seemed to be too good to

be true, and partly because, though Martin had continued to babble, I had heard not a word. Wild, therefore, to have the thing confirmed, I cut him short; and crying, "But what Smith is it, do you say? Who is he?" I brought him back to the point at which he had left me.

"Why, Mr. Price," he answered, "I thought everyone knew Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith, Mr. Bridges's factotum, land-steward, what you will! He married the Countess's fine madam—madame they call her in the household, though she is no French thing but Hertfordshire born, as I knew by her speech when my lord first took up with her. But not everyone knows that."

"When my lord took up with her?" I said, groping among half-recognised objects, and beginning—so much light may come through the least chink—to see day.

Mr. Martin nodded confidentially. "That is how she came to be with my lady," he said. "And Mr. Smith, too! My lord met her somewhere when he was young and gay and took up with her, and to please her got the place for Mr. Smith, who had been her flame before. However, my lord soon tired of her, for though she was a beauty she had common ways and was bold as brass; so when he parted

from her she went back to her old love, who had first made her the mode, and married him. I have heard that my lord was in a pretty taking when he found her planted at the Countess's. But I have nothing to say against her."

"Does my lord—see her now?" I said with an effort.

"When he does he looks pretty black at her. And I fancy that there is no love lost on her side."

"What did you say that—they called her?" I asked.

"Madame—Madame Monterey."

I remembered where I had heard the name before and who had borne it; and saw so much light that I was dazzled. "And my lord's mother—who married Mr. Bridges. She is a Papist?"

"Hush!" he said. "The less said about such things the better, Mr. Price."

But I persisted. "It was she who ran off with my Lord Buckingham in King Charles's time," I cried, "and held his horse while he killed her husband? And who had Mr. Killigrew stabbed in the street; and——"

In a panic he clapped his hand on my mouth. "God, man!" he cried, "do you know where you are, or is your head turned? Do you think that this

house is a fit place to give tongue to such things? Lord, you will be but a short time here, and to the pillory when you go, if you throw your tongue that way! I have not blabbed as much in twenty years, and would not for a kingdom! Who are you to talk of such as my lady?"

He was so righteously indignant at the presumption of which I had been guilty in attacking the family that, though it was his own indiscretion that had led me to the point, I made haste to mutter an apology, and doing this with the better grace for the remembrance that Smith was now powerless and his wicked plans abortive, I contrived presently to appease him. But the ferment which the discovery I had made wrought in my spirits moved me to escape as quickly as possible to my room, there to consider at leisure the miserable position in which, but for Smith's timely capture, I must have found myself.

A suspicion of the truth I had entertained before; but this certainty that the man I was to be trepanned into personating was my benefactor, and that in the plot his own mother was engaged, filled me with as much horror, when I considered the necessity of complying under which I might have lain,

as thankfulness when I reflected on the escape I had had. Nor did these two considerations, overwhelming as they may well appear, account for all the agitation I was experiencing. Mr. Martin, in speaking of Madame Monterey's origin, had mentioned Hertfordshire; and the name, bringing together two sets of facts hitherto so distant in my mind that I had never undertaken to connect them, had in a flash presented Smith and madame in their true colours. Why I had not before associated the Smith I now knew with that Templar Smith whom I darkly remembered as Jennie's accomplice in my early trouble; why I had not recognised in the woman's coarsely handsome features the charms that thirteen years before had fired my boy's blood and brought me to the foot of the gallows, is not more difficult to explain than why this one mention of Hertfordshire sufficed to raise the curtain; ay, and not only to raise it, but to set the whole drama so plainly before me that I could be no wiser had I followed every scene in madame's life, and, a witness of her shameful *début* under Smith's protection, her seduction of my lord and her period of splendour, had attended her in her final declension when, a discarded mistress, she saw no better alternative than a marriage with her former protector.

How greatly this identification of the two conspirators increased, as well as the loathing in which I held their schemes, as my relief upon the reflection that those schemes were now futile, I will not say. Suffice it that the knowledge that, but for Smith's arrest, I must have chosen between playing the basest part in the world and running a risk whereat I shuddered, filled me with thankfulness immeasurable, a thankfulness which I did not fail to pour out on my knees, and which was in no degree lessened by a shuddering consciousness that in that dilemma, had Providence not averted it, I might have—ay, should have—played the baser part!

No wonder that a hundred harrowing recollections crowded on my mind, or that under the pressure of these the tumult of my spirits became so powerful that I presently seized my hat, and hastily escaping from the house, sought in rapid movement some relief from the unpleasant retrospect. Crossing the Green Park, I chose a field path that led by the Pimlico marshes to Fulham; and gradually the songs of the larks and the spring sunshine—for the day was calm and serene—leading my mind into a more cheerful groove, I began to dwell rather on the fact of my escape than on the crime from which I had escaped, and contemplating the secure career that now lay in

view before me, I was not long in seeing that thankfulness should be my strongest feeling. Turning my back on Smith and his like, I began to build my house again; saw a smiling wife and babes, and days spent between my home and my lord's papers; and then a green old age and slippered feet tottering through the quiet shades of a library. Before I turned I had roofed the house with an honourable headstone, and felt the tears rise in generous sympathy with the village assembled to do the old man honour.

In a word, tasting the full relief of emancipation, I became so gay and lightsome that even the smoke and din of London, when I re-entered it, failed to subdue the unusual humour. I could have sung, I could have laughed aloud. Let the dead past bury its dead! For Ferguson, Smith, the Monterey—a fig! Who had come off best after all? And of their fine plottings and contrivings what had been the upshot? They had failed and I had triumphed: they were prisoners, I was free and safe.

Near the garden-wall of Buckingham House there was a bear dancing, and a press of people round it. I stayed to watch, and in my mood, found the fun so much to my taste that I threw the man a penny and went on laughing. A little further, by the edge of

the lake, was a man with a barrow and dice—then a novelty, though now so prevalent that at the last sessions, I am told, the thing was presented for a nuisance. I stood here and saw a man lose, and in the exaltation of my spirits, pushed him aside and laid down a shilling, and won, and won again—and again; whether the cog failed or the truckster who owned the barrow thought me a good bait. Either way I took up my winnings with an air and hectored away as good a bully as another; placed for the moment so far above myself and common modesty, that I wondered whether I should ever sink back into the timid citizen, or feel my eyes drop before a bravo's.

Alas, in a moment, *quantum mutatus ab illo!* At the corner of the Cockpit, towards Sion House, I met Matthew Smith.

I had no doubt. I knew all in an instant, and turned sick. He was free, alone, walking with his head high and an easy gait. Worse, he saw me; saw how I cowered and shrank into myself, and became another man at sight of him!

Slackening his pace as he came up, he halted before me, with that quiet devil's grin on his face. "Well," he said, "how are you, Mr. Price? I was looking for you."

"For me?" I muttered. "I thought—I heard—that you were arrested."

"A mistake!" he answered, continuing to smile. "A mistake! Some other Smith."

"And you were not arrested?" I whispered.

"Oh, I was arrested!" he answered jauntily. "And taken to the Secretary. And of course released. There! you have it all."

I uttered an exclamation; two words wrung from me by despair.

Thereat, and pretending to misunderstand me. "You thank God? Very kind of you, Mr. Price," said he grinning. "Like master, like man, I see. The Duke was kindness itself. But I must be going." And then, arresting himself in the act of leaving me, "You have heard," he continued, "that the poor devil Charnock stands his trial to-morrow? Porter is an evidence, and by Monday the parson will swing. It should be a warning to us," he continued, shaking his head with a smile that chilled the marrow in my bones, "what company we keep. A rascal like Porter might see you or me in the street—and swear to us. Ha! Ha! It sounds monstrous odd, but so it might be. But by-by, Mr. Price. I must not keep you."

CHAPTER X.

THE state in which I crawled back to the house after this encounter may be conceived but not described. From an exaltation of mind to which the epithet delirious might be applied with propriety, I fell in an instant to a depth of abjectness as monstrous as my late felicity, but more real and reasonable. All the things, on my escape from which I had been congratulating myself, now lay before me, and formed a vista as gloomy as the point to which it tended was dreadful. To be a slave to the woman and man who had ruined my youth; to live outwardly at ease, while inwardly devoured by daily and hourly terror; to hang between the choice of danger or baseness, comfort or treachery; to discern in my own destruction or my patron's the inevitable ending; beyond all, to foresee that I should choose the evil and eschew the good, and to wish it otherwise and be powerless to change it—these things, and particularly the last, filled me with anticipations of misery so great that I rolled on my bed, and

cursed Providence and my fate; and next day went down so pale, and ill, and woe-begone that the servants took note of it.

"Pheugh, Mr. Price," said Martin, "you might be Charnock himself, or Keyes, poor devil! You could not look more like hanging! What is it?"

I muttered that I was not well.

"It is Keyes I am sorry for," continued the steward, who was taking his morning draught, "if so be they go to the end with him. I have heard of a master given up by his servant, but never before of a servant hung on his master's evidence—and his master the one that drew him into it! Hang Captain Porter, say I! A fine Captain!"

"Oh, they will let the poor devil live," said another.

"Keyes?"

"Ay."

"Not they!" said Mr. Martin with great appearance of wisdom. "He was in the Blues, do you see, my man, and if it spread there? No, he will swing. He will swing for the example. Don't you think so, Mr. Price? You are in there with my lord, and should know."

But I muttered something and escaped, finding solitude and my own reflections as tolerable as their

gossip. A little later, my lord, sending for me, kept me close at work until evening; which was so far fortunate, as the employment, by diverting my thoughts, helped to lift me out of the panic into which I had fallen. True, the news that the three conspirators were found guilty and were to die the following Monday, exactly as Smith had foretold, threw me again into the cold fit, and heralded another night of misery. But as it is not possible for mortals to lie long under the same peril without the sense of danger losing its edge, in three days I began to find life bearable. The stateliness of the household, the silence and books that surrounded me, the regular hours and steady employment soothed my nerves; and Smith making no sign, and nothing occurring to indicate that he meant to keep his word or summon me to fulfil mine, I lulled myself into the belief that all was a dream.

Yet I was very far from being happy: to be that, with such apprehensions as never quite left me, was beyond my philosophy. And I had rude awakenings. One day it was the execution of Charnock, King, and Keyes at Tyburn, followed by the hawking of their last dying speeches and confessions in the streets, that jogged me out of my fancied security, and sent me sick and white-faced from the windows.

Another it was the sentence on Sir John Friend and Sir William Perkins, the two elderly citizens whom I had twice seen among the plotters, and never without wondering how they came to be of the gang. A little later, three more suffered, and again the Square rang with the shrill cries of the chapmen who peddled their last speeches from door to door. Against all these Captain Porter and a man commonly called "Scum Goodman," both *participes criminis*, and persons of the most infamous character, bore witness; their evidence being corroborated by that of a man of higher standing, Mr. Prendergast. Whether they could not prove against Cassel and Ferguson, or reasons of State intervened, these, with several of their fellows, lay in prison untried; a course which, in other circumstances, might have involved the Government in obloquy. But so keen at this time was the general feeling against the plotters, and so high the King's popularity that he might have shed more blood had he chosen. Here, however, the executions stopped; and his Majesty showing mercy if not indulgence, the hue and cry, despite the popular indignation, gradually slackened until it was restricted to Sir John Fenwick, who was believed to be still in hiding in the country, and on whose punishment the King was reported to be firmly set.

How deeply these events and rumours, which formed the staple of conversation during the summer of '96, troubled my existence, I leave to the imagination; provising only that in proportion to the outward quiet of my life was the power to agitate which they exerted.

Moreover, there were times when a terror more substantial trespassed on my peace. One day going hastily into the hall I found the servants all peeping, Mr. Martin holding open the door, a dozen faces staring curiously in from the sunshine of the Square, and my lord standing, very stiff, on the threshold of his room, while in the middle of the floor stood a scowling man, flashily dressed.

The Duke was speaking when I appeared. "At the office, sir," I heard him say. "You misunderstood me. I can see you there only."

"Your Grace is hard on me," the man muttered with a glance that would be rebellious, and was hang-dog. "I have done the King good service, and this is the way I am requited. It is enough——"

"It is more than enough, Captain Porter," my lord said, quietly taking him up. "At the office, if you please. This house is for my friends."

"And the King's friends? They may shift for

themselves?" the wretch—who even then wore finery bought with blood—cried bitterly.

"The King is served in many ways," my lord answered with a fine air of contempt. "Martin, the door! And remember, another time I am not within to Captain Porter. At three in the office, sir, if you please."

The man slunk away at that; but as he passed through the doorway, I heard him mutter that when Sir John Fenwick was taken he would see; and that proud as some people were now, they might be glad to save their necks when the time came. He passed out of sight then, and hearing my lord speak, I turned, and saw Matthew Smith, whom I had not before noticed, waiting on him with a letter. The Duke, pausing on the threshold of the library, broke the seal, and ran his eye over the paper.

"I will send an answer," he said, "later in the day. Or——" and he looked up quickly. "Are you returning, sir?"

"If your Grace pleases."

"It shall be ready then by two o'clock," my lord answered stiffly. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, your Grace."

And my lord went in. The colloquy had been of the slightest; but I had noted that my patron's

tone, when he spoke to Smith, was guarded and civil, if distant, and that through the few formal words they had exchanged peered a sort of understanding. This shook me; and when Smith turned to me, a faint sneer on his lips, and told me that I was a bold man, my heart was water. He was at home here as everywhere; what could I do against him?

"Do you understand, Mr. Price?" he repeated. "Or are you a bigger fool than I take you for?"

"Why?" I stammered.

"Why? Why, to push in on Porter after that fashion," he muttered under his breath—for Martin was making towards us. "Lucky he did not recognise you and denounce you! For a groat he would do it—or to spite the Duke! Take care, man," he continued seriously, "if you do not want to join Charnock, whose head is in airy quarters to-night."

This left me the prey of a new terror; for remembering that I had once seen Porter at Ferguson's lodging, I could not shut my eyes to the reasonableness of the warning. I saw myself beset by dangers on that side also, went for a time on eggs, and trembled at every sound; indeed, for a full fortnight I never passed the threshold—excusing myself on the ground of vertigo, if ordered to go on errands. In the course of that fortnight I had a thousand

opportunities of contrasting the quiet in which I lived, behind the dull windows of the great house, with the dangers into which I might at any moment be flung; and if any man ever repented of anything, I repented of my lack of candour respecting Smith. From time to time I saw him pass—grim, reserved, a walking menace. When he looked up at the windows, I read mastery and a secret knowledge in his eye; while the way in which he went and came, free and unquestioned, was itself a monition; was it to be wondered that I feared this man, who, while Charnock's head mouldered on a spike on Temple Bar, and Friend and Perkins passed to the gallows, walked the Strand, and lounged in the Mall, as safe in appearance as my lord himself?

I knew that at any moment he might call upon me to fulfil my word. Whether in that case, the demand being such as to allow me leisure to forecast the consequences, I should have complied, or taking my courage in my hands, have thrown myself on my lord's indulgence, I cannot now say; for in the issue a sudden and unforeseen shifting of scene prevented my calculations, and hurried me onwards, whether I would or no.

It happened, I have said, suddenly. One afternoon there came a great bustle in the Square; and

who should it be but the Countess, my lord's mother, come to visit him in her coach-and-six, with such a paraphernalia of gentlewomen and negro pages, outriders, and running footmen, as drew together all the ragamuffins from the mews, and fairly brought back King Charles's days. As the great coach, which held six inside, swung and lumbered to a stand at the door, I saw a painted face, with bold black eyes, glaring from the window, cheek by jowl with a parrot and three or four spaniels; and I waited to see little more, a single glance sufficing to certify me that this was the same lady to whose house Smith had taken me. Smith was in attendance on her, and a gentleman in a plain black suit and wig—who was a Papist priest if I ever saw one—and Monterey, and two or three other gentlewomen; and, as I had no mind to be recognised by these, or for that matter, by their mistress, I made haste to retire behind the flock of servants whom Martin had marshalled in the hall to do the honours.

My lord went out to the coach and brought the Countess in, with a great show of reverence; and for three-quarters of an hour they were closeted together in his room. I took advantage of this to retire upstairs, and had been wiser had I stayed there, or better still, slipped out at the back. But a craving

came on me to see Monterey again, and with the knowledge I now had, ascertain if she really was my old mistress. This drew me to the hall again, where, the crowd being great, and the servants taken up with teasing the Countess's parrot and blackamoors, I managed to avoid observation, and at the same time see what I wanted. The woman who had once been all the world to me—and of whom I could not now think without a tender regret, directed, not to her, but to the state of blissful, dawning passion, of which she had been the cause, and whereof no man is twice capable—was still handsome in a coarse fashion, and when seen at a distance. I could not deny that. But if I desired revenge, I had it; for not only was her complexion gone, so that her good looks vanished when the viewer approached, but her lips had grown thin, and her face hard, with the indescribable hardness which speaks of past sin long grown bitter—and an hourly, daily recognition that the wage of sin is death.

Presently, while Mr. Martin was pressing his civilities on her, and I, from a corner near the door through which I had let Mary escape, was curiously reading her countenance, the door of my lord's room opened, and the Countess came out, supported on the one side by the Duke's arm, on the other by her

great ebony cane. The servants hurried to form two lines; and I suppose curiosity let me to press nearer than was prudent, or her eyes were of peculiar sharpness; or perhaps she looked for me, and had I not been there would have called for me. At any rate, she had not moved three steps towards her coach before her gaze, roving along the line of servants, alighted on me; and she stood.

"I'll have *that* rascal!" she cried in her high, shrill voice—and she pointed at me with her cane, and stood. "He looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth, but if he is not a lad of wax, call me a street slut! Hark you, my man; you come with me. Bid him, Shrewsbury!"

My lord, his face flushing, spoke low, and seemed to make demur; but she persisted.

"Odd's life; you make me sick!" she cried irritably. "You will not this, and you fancy that! The servants—— Go to for a fool! In my time master was master, and if any blabbed, man or maid, it was strip and whip! But now—do you quarrel with me, or do you not?"

The Duke shrugged his shoulders, and smiled uneasily. "Times are somewhat changed, madam," he said.

"Ay, by our lord, they are," she cried, swearing

roundly. "And why? Because there are no men nowadays, but mealy-mouthed Josephs, like that trembler yonder, whose heart is in his boots because I want him carry a message." And she pointed to me with her long cane, while her head quivered with excitement and age. "Sort him out; sort him out and send him with me; or we quarrel, my lord."

"Well, madam, your will is law in this house," the Duke said; "but——"

"But no lies!" she cried. "D'ye send him."

My lord bowed reluctantly. "Go," he said, looking at me.

"And bid him do as I tell him," she cried sharply. "But he had better, or—— Still, tell him, tell him."

"Price," my lord said soberly, "the Countess is good enough to wish you to do an errand for her. Be good enough to consider yourself at her disposal, and go with the coach now. Be easy," he continued, nodding pleasantly—it was impossible for me to hide my apprehensions—"her ladyship needs you for a week only."

"Ay, sure!" she cried. "After that he may go to the devil for me!"

CHAPTER XI.

RIGHTLY has the Latin poet sung of the *dura ilia* of the Fates, who either resistless rout all human resolutions, or, where the mind has been hardened to meet the attack, turn the poor wretch's flank, and lo! while he squares his shield, and shortens his spear to meet the occasion, *habet*—he has it under the fifth rib.

So it was with me. While I dreamed of resistance, and would harden my heart and set fast my feet, fate cross-buttocked me; and I fell, not knowing. The Countess's coach bore me away, unresisting; and Smith, whom I hated as I never hated even Ferguson, gave me the word. From my plain clothes, to the long curled peruke, the cravat, ruffles, and fine suit in which I had once before paraded myself, was but a step; I took it perforce, and being conducted, when I was ready, into the Countess's chamber, to wait her pleasure, could have fancied the last six months a dream—could have fancied the conspirators still at work, Captain Barclay still

pacing the Piazza, my lord still a stranger to me, the library a vision; in a word, I could have fancied all those events, which had filled half a year, to be no more than creatures of the imagination, so unchanged was the great silent room, where my lady, while I waited, played piquet with Monterey, amid the gorgeousness of her rose-and-silver suite.

The monkey gibbered as of old, and the parrot vied with the brodered parrots on the wall; and now, as then, the air was heavy with scent and musk, while the light, cunningly arranged, fell on the part where the Countess sat, now grumbling and now swearing, or now, while the cards were dealing, thumping the floor impatiently with her stick. She had so perfectly the grand air of a past generation, that when her eye turned in my direction I trembled, and thought no more of resistance; yet when she resumed the game, she gradually—and more and more completely, as I watched—sank into a querulous, feeble, fierce old woman, whose passion, where it did not terrify, moved to derision, and whose fads and fancies, as patent as the day, placed her at the mercy of all who cared to flatter or cozen her.

Madame was about it now; letting her win, and again gaining a slight advantage; mingling hints at old vanities and conquests (whereat my lady grew

garrulous) with new scandals, coarse and spiteful; whining a little when my lady, in a fury caused by a bad hand, struck her across the face with a fan to teach her to be awkward, but cheering up at once when the Countess's mood changed with the cards. In a word, as she had betrayed me young, she cozened my lady old; but seeing her features grown hard with time, and her eyes grown lifeless, and the devil grinning more plainly from behind the mask, that once had been so fair, it was a wonder to me that even the Countess was deceived.

Presently my lady threw down her cards in a rage, and calling her opponent a cheating slut, proceeded to turn her anger on me.

"What is the gaby doing, standing there like a gawk?" she shrieked. "Why is he not about his business?"

Monterey whispered her that I had not had my instructions.

"Then give them, and let him go!" she cried. "Where is the ring? Here, you daw in peacock's feathers—like my son, indeed? About as like as that squinting vixen Villiers is to a beauty! Take that, and ride with Matthew Smith, and give it to the gentleman you will meet at the inn at Ashford, and say—Monterey, tell him what to say."

“Say, ‘Colonel Talbot sends this ring, and his service.’ And if the gentleman asks ‘Whither?’ or this, or that, to whatever he asks, answer thus: ‘I am not here, Sir John, to answer questions. Favour me by conveying that ring and my services whither you are going. I do not talk, but when the time comes I shall act.’”

“*C’est tout!*” said the Countess, nodding approval. “If you are not man enough to repeat that, whip you for a noodle! Say it, man.”

But when I went to say it, first I could not remember it, and broke down; and then when, my lady storming at me for a fool and an imbecile, I had got the sentences into my head, I but whimpered them, bringing no heart to the task. My lady, when she saw that, flew out at me afresh, and threw first the vapours bottle and then her cane at me, which, breaking a piece of china, put her fairly beside herself. “Come here!” she shrieked, swaying to and fro in her chair. “Do you hear, you puling, psalm-singing canter? Come here, I say!” And when, trembling and scared, I had approached, she leant forward, and seizing hold of my ear, as Ferguson had once seized it, she twisted it with such unexpected strength and spite that I roared with pain, and fairly fell on my knees beside her.

"There is for you, *gros cochon!*" she cried. "So you *can* speak up when you like! Now go to the end of the room, my man, and play your part again, and play it better! Or, by ——, I will have up those who shall lash your back to the bone. Hoity toity! These are fine times, when scum like you, my lad, put on airs!"

This was not the discipline, nor were these the threats, to give an actor courage; but in sheer desperation, I spoke up, and, this time, had the good fortune to please her; and, Monterey mocking me, and pushing me this way and that, I went through my part a dozen times. At length the Countess expressed herself satisfied, and with a grim nod, and an "Odds my life, he is not so unlike, after all!" gave me leave to go. But when I was half way to the door, she called me back, and after I had timidly obeyed, she sat awhile, glowering at me in silence. At last "No," she said irritably, "it is too late!" and she struck on the floor with her stick. "It is too late to turn back! The cross devil did nothing but thwart me to-day, and what he will not do *bon gré*, he shall do perforce. He has brought it on himself, and he must abide his *destin!* Yet—Monterey!"

The woman was at her side in a moment. "Yes, madam!"

"I suppose that there is no danger of a *contre-temps*," she said, stirring restlessly in her chair. "Sir John will get away? They will not take him, and find the ring on him—and learn whose it is?"

On that, if I had been quick, and had had both wits and courage at command, I should have thrown myself at her feet; and so I might have opened her eyes. But I wavered, and before I had found heart to do it, the waiting-woman, smooth and watchful, was in the breach.

"Ashford, my lady, is only three hours' riding from Dymchurch in the Marsh," she said, "where the boat waits for him to-morrow night. Sir John is well mounted, and it will be odd, if, after baffling pursuit for months, he should be taken in that time."

"Yes, yes!" my lady said querulously. "Let him go! Let him go! Though you are a fool to boot. A man is taken or not taken in less than three hours. Even now, if that contrary devil of a son of mine had not argued with me, and argued with me to-day—but, let him go! Let him go!"

The woman lost no time in taking her at her word, and hurrying me out; not by the main entrance through which I had come in, but by the little side

door, leading to the dingy closet at the head of the private staircase. In the closet a bright, unshaded lamp burned on the dusty table, and beside it stood Matthew Smith, wearing a cloak, riding-boots, and a great flapped hat. He looked eagerly at the woman, his eyes shining in the glare of the lamp; but he did not speak until she had closed the door behind her. Then, "Is it right?" he whispered.

She nodded.

"You have got the ring?"

She gave it to him with a smile of triumph.

He looked at it, and with a grim face slipped it into his pocket. "Good," he said, "and now, my friend, the sooner we are away, the better."

But my gorge rose. On the table beside him, in the full glare of the lamp, lay a cloak and holsters, a mask, sword, and riding-whip. I knew what these objects meant, and for whom they were prepared; and at the prospect of the plunge into the dark night, of the journey, and the perils of the unknown road, I cried out that I would not go! I would not go! And I tried to force my way back into the Countess's room—with what intention heaven knows.

But Smith whipped between me and the door. "You fool!" he said, pushing me back. "Are you mad? Or don't you know me yet?"

"I know you too well!" I cried, beside myself with rage, and with apprehensions of the plunge on the brink of which I stood. "You have cursed me from the first day I saw you at Ware! You have been the curse of my life! You, and that Jezebel!"

"Are you mad?" he said again; and threatened me with his hand.

But she came a step nearer to me, and peered at me; and after one look took the lamp from the table and held it to my face. "At Ware?" she said "At Ware?" And then, putting the lamp back on the table, she fell to laughing. "He is right!" she said. "I know him now. But you told me that his name was Taylor."

"Taylor?" he said wrathfully. "So it is; and Price, and half a dozen other names, for all I know. What does it matter what his name is?"

"Oh, it matters very much," she said, affecting to ogle me in an exaggerated fashion. "He is an old flame of mine. His face always brought something to my mind—but I thought that it was his likeness to the Duke."

He cursed her old flames, and the Duke. And then, "What does it mean?" he said. "Who is he?"

"He is the lad we left at Ware—in the old

woman's room," she answered, her voice sinking, and growing almost soft. "Lord! it seems so long ago, it might have happened in another life! You remember him, Matt? You saw him with me at The Rose one night? The first night I saw you?"

He looked at me, long and strangely. "And what does it mean?" he said at last, scowling between wonder and suspicion.

She shrugged her shoulders. "*Sais pas!*" she answered. "Ask him!"

"You ruined me once!" I cried. "And he saved me! And now you would have me ruin him. You are devils, you are! Devils! But I defy you!"

He did not answer, but continued to stare at me; as if he discerned or suspected that there was more in this than appeared on the surface. At length the woman laughed, and he turned to her, rage in his face. "I see nothing to laugh at," he said.

"But I do!" she answered pertly. "You three all mixed up! It would make a cat laugh, my lad."

He cursed her. "Have done with that!" he said fiercely. "And say, what is to be done?"

"Done?" she answered briskly, and in a tone of genuine surprise. "Why, that which was to be done. What difference does this make?"

But he looked at her, pondering darkly, as if it did make a difference. I suppose that somewhere, deep down in his nature, there lurked a grain of superstition, which found in this singular coincidence, this sudden stringing together of persons long parted, an evil omen. Or it may be that he had still some scrap of conscience left, that, seared and deadened as it was, stirred and started at this strange upheaval of an old crime. At any rate, "I don't know," he growled at last. "I don't like it, and that is flat. There is some practice in this."

"There is a fool in it," she answered naïvely. "And there are like to be two!"

I thought to back him up, and I braced myself against the wall, to which I had retired. "I won't go!" I said doggedly. "I will call for help in the streets, first!"

"You will do as you are told," she answered coolly. "And you," she continued to Smith in a voice of stinging scorn, "are you going to give it up now, when all is safe? Will you stand to my lord as this poor silly fellow stands to you? Have you waited for years for your revenge—to move aside now? Why, my G—d! the Duke is worth ten of you. He is a man, at any rate. He is——"

"Peace, girl," he cried, with I know not what of menace in his tone.

"Then, will you go?"

"Yes, I will go!" he answered between his teeth. "But by heaven, you slut, if ill comes of it, I will wring your neck! I will, so help me heaven! You shall deceive no other man! If there is practice of yours in this, if this tool is here by your connivance——"

"He is not!" she answered. "Be satisfied."

Apparently he was satisfied, for he drew a deep breath, and stood silent. She turned to me. "Get ready," she said sharply.

"No," I muttered, summoning all my resolution. "I shall not go. I—I have not——"

Smith turned to me, and the refusal died on my lips. The struggle with the woman had roused the man's passions; and I read in his eyes such a glare of ferocity as chilled my blood and unstrung my knees. Nor was that all; for when I went, trembling, to take the cloak, "One moment," he said grimly, "not so fast, my friend. Let us understand one another before we start. Mr. Price or Mr. Taylor or whatever your name is, take note, do you hear me, of three things? One, that the business we are on is life or death. Do you grasp that?"

I muttered a shuddering assent.

"Secondly," he continued, with the same gruesome civility, "my hand will never be more than six inches from the butt of a pistol, until I see this home again. Do you grasp that?"

I nodded.

"Thirdly, at the least sign of treachery or disobedience on your part, I blow out your brains first, and my own afterwards, if that be necessary. Do you grasp that?"

I nodded.

"That is especially well," he said. "Because the last item is important to you. On the other hand, Mr. Price, play honest John with me, and in forty-eight hours you shall be back in your master's house, free and safe; and I shall trouble you no more. Do you understand that?"

I said I did; my teeth chattering, and my eyes seeking to evade his.

"Then, now, you may get into those things," he said. "And do you ride when I bid you, and halt when I bid you, and speak when I say speak, and be silent when I say be silent—do those four things, I say, and you will die in your bed. They are all I ask."

I stooped, shaking all over, to take up the boots,

“Heart up, pretty!” cried the woman, with an odd laugh that broke off short with a sort of quaver. “It is clear that you are not born to be hanged. And for the rest——”

“Peace, peace, wench,” said Smith impatiently. “And dress him.”

CHAPTER XII.

IT wanted two hours of midnight on a fine night when we two rode over London Bridge, and through a gap in the houses saw the river flowing below, a ripple of silver framed in blackness, and so cold to the eye that involuntarily I shivered; feeling a return of all the vague fears and apprehensions which, originally awakened by the prospect of the journey, had been set at rest for the time by the awe in which I held my companion. I began to recall a dozen stories of footpads and highwaymen, outrage and robbery, which I had read, and found but cold comfort in the reflection that the Kent Road, from the amount of traffic that used it, was accounted one of the safest in England. It was not wonderful, that with nerves so disordered, I went in front of danger; or that when—opposite the Marshalsea, where the chain crosses the road, near the entrance to White Horse Yard—a man came suddenly out of a passage and caught hold of my companion's rein, I cried out, and all but turned my horse to fly.

Smith himself appeared to be taken off his guard; for, after bidding me beware what I did, he called with the same harshness to the man to release the rein, or take the consequences.

"Oh, I am all right," the fellow answered roughly, peering at him through the darkness. "You are Mr. Smith?"

"Well?"

"Fairholt sent me—to stop you."

"Fairholt!"

"Ay, he is here."

"Here?" my companion cried, in a tone of rage and surprise. "What the——! Why, he should be—you know where, by this time!"

"Ay, but his horse threw him this morning, and he is lying at the White Horse here, with a broken leg!"

Smith cursed the absent man for a fool. "I wish he had broken his neck!" he said savagely. And then, after an interval, "Has he sent anybody?"

"He has had something else to think about," the man answered drily. "And so would you, master, with his leg!"

Smith swore again, and sat gloomily silent.

"He says if you can stead it off for twenty-

four hours," the man continued, "he will arrange that——"

"No names," Smith cried sharply, interrupting him.

"Well, that—someone shall take his place and do the job."

Smith did not answer for a time, but at length in a curt, incisive tone, "Tell him, yes," he said. "I will see to it. And you—keep a still tongue, will you? You were going with him, I suppose?"

"Ay."

"And you will come with the other?"

"May be. And if not I shall not blab."

Smith by a nod showed that the man had taken his meaning; after which, bidding him good-night, he pricked up his horse. "Come on," he said, addressing me with impatience. "I thought to have had companions, and so ridden more securely. But we must make the best of it."

Heaven knows that I too would have liked companions, and took the road again dolefully enough. Nor was that the worst of it; Smith, in speaking to the stranger, had mentioned Fairholt. Now, I knew the name, and knew the man to be one of the messengers attached to the Secretary's office, one whose business it was to execute warrants and arrest

political prisoners. But what had Smith, riding to a secret interview with a man outlawed and in hiding, to do with messengers? With Fairholt?

And then, as if this were not enough to disturb me with a view of treachery, black as gulf seen by traveller through a rift in the mist—if this glimpse, I say, were not enough, how was I going to reconcile Smith's statement that he had expected companions with his first cry, uttered in wrath and surprise—that Fairholt ought to be by this time—well, at some distant point?

In fine, I was so far from being persuaded that Smith had expected company, that I gravely suspected that he had made quite other arrangements; arrangements of the most perfidious character. And as the horses' hoofs rang monotonously on the hard road, and we rose and fell in the saddle, and I peered forward into the gloom, fearing all things and doubting all things, for certain I feared and doubted nothing so much as I did the dark and secret man beside me; whose scheming brain, spinning plot within plot, each darker and more involved than the other, kept all my ingenuity at a stretch to overtake the final end and purpose he had at heart.

Indeed, I despair of conveying to others how gravely this sombre companionship and more sombre

uncertainty aggravated the terrors of a journey, that at the best of times must have been little to my taste. To the common risks of the road, deserted at that hour by all save cut-purses and rogues, was added a suspicion, as much more harassing than these, as unseen dangers ever surpass the known. It was in vain that I strove to divert my mind from the figure by my side; neither the bleak heath above Greenwich—whence we looked back at the reddish haze that canopied London, and forward to where the Thames marshes stretched eastward under night—nor the gibbet on Dartford Brent, where a body hung in chains, poisoning the air, nor the light that shone dim and solitary, far to the left, across the river, and puzzled me until he told me that it was Tilbury—neither of these things, I say, though they occupied my thoughts by turns and for a moment, had power to drive him from my mind, or divert my fears to dangers more apparent. And in this mood, now glancing askance at him, and now moving uneasily under his gaze, I might have ridden to Rochester if my ear had not caught—I think when we were two or three miles short of the city—the sound of a horse trotting fast on the road behind us.

At first it followed so faintly on the breeze that I doubted, thinking it might be either the echo of

our hoofs, or a pulse beating in my ears. Then, on a hard piece of ground, it declared itself unmistakably; and again as suddenly it died away.

At that I spoke involuntarily. "He has stopped," I said.

Smith laughed in his teeth. "He is crossing the wet bottom, fool—by the creek," he said.

And before I could answer him the dull sound of a horse galloping fast, but moving on the turf that ran alongside the road, proved him to be right. "Draw up!" he whispered in something of a hurry, and then, as I hesitated, "Do you hear?" he continued, sharply seizing my rein. "What do you fear? Do you think that night birds prey on night birds?"

Whatever I feared, I feared him more: and turning my horse, I sat shivering. For notwithstanding his confident words I saw that he was handling his holster; and I knew that he was drawing a pistol; and it was well the suspense was short. Before I had time for many qualms, the horseman, a dark figure, lurched on us through the gloom, pulled his horse on to its haunches, and, with raised hand, cried to us to deliver.

"And no nonsense!" he added sharply. "Or a brace of balls will soon——"

Smith laughed. "Box it about!" he cried.

"Hallo!" the stranger answered, taking a lower tone; and he peered at us, bending down over his horse's neck. "Who are you, in fly-by-night?"

"A box-it-about!" my companion answered with tartness. "That is enough for you. So good-night. And I wish you better luck next time."

"But——"

"St!" Smith answered, cutting him short. "I am going to my father, and the less said about it the better."

"So? Well, give him my love, then." And backing his horse, the stranger bade us good-night, and with a curse on his bad fortune turned and rode off. Smith saw him go, and then wheeling we took the road again.

Safely, however, as we had emerged from this encounter, and far as it went towards proving that we bore a talisman against the ordinary perils of travellers, it was not of a kind to reassure a law-abiding man. To be hung as the accomplice of footpads and high-tobys was a scarcely better fate than to be robbed and wounded by them, and I was heartily glad when we found ourselves in the outskirts of Rochester, and stopping at a house of call outside the sleeping city, roused a drowsy hostler,

and late as the hour was, gained entrance and a welcome.

I confess, that safe in these comfortable quarters, on a sanded hearth, before a rekindled fire, with lights, and food, and ale at my elbow, and a bed in prospect, I found my apprehensions and misgivings less hard to bear than on the dark road above Tilbury flats. I began to think less of the body creaking in its irons on the gibbet above Dartford, and more of the chances of ultimate safety. And Smith growing civil, if not genial, I went on to count the hours that must elapse, before, our miserable mission accomplished, I should see London again. After all, why should I not see London again? What was to prevent me? Where lay the hindrance? In three days, in three days we should be back. So I told myself; and looking up quickly met Smith's eyes brooding gloomily on me.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUCH a night ride as I have described, would have been impossible, or at least outrageously dangerous, a year or two later; when a horde of disbanded soldiers, dismissed from the colours by the Peace of Ryswick, took to the roads for a subsistence, and for a period, until they perished miserably, made even the purlieus of Kensington unsafe.

At the time of which I write we ran risk enough, as has been demonstrated; but the reasons which induced Smith to leave London at that hour, and under cover of darkness, may be conceived. Apparently they did not extend to the rest of the journey; for, after lying late at Rochester, we rode on by Sittingbourne to Feversham, and thence after a comfortable dinner, turned south by Badlesmere, and so towards Ashford, where we arrived a few minutes after nightfall.

Those who are acquainted with the Old Inn at the entrance into Ashford will remember that the yard and stables are as conspicuous for size and commodiousness as the house, a black and white

building, a little withdrawn from the street, is strikingly marked by the lack of those advantages. I believe that the huge concourse thither of cattle-drovers at the season of the great fairs is the cause of this; those persons lying close themselves but needing space for their beasts. And at such times I can imagine that the roomy *enceinte*, and those long lines of buildings, may be cheerful enough.

But seen, as we saw them, when we rode in, by the last cold light of a dull evening, with nothing clear or plain save the roof ridge, and that black against a pale sky, they and the place looked infinitely dismal. Nor did any warmth of welcome, or cheerful greeting, such as even poor inns afford to all and sundry, amend the first impression of gloom and decay, which the house and its surroundings conveyed to the mind. On the contrary, not a soul was to be seen, and we had ridden half way across the yard, and Smith had twice called "House! House!" before anyone was aroused.

Then the upper half of a stable-door creaked open, and a man holding up a great horn lanthorn, peered out at us.

"Are you all asleep?" cried my companion. And when the man made no answer, but still continued to look at us, "What is in the house," he added,

angrily, "that you stick out your death's head to frighten company? Is it lace or old Nantz? Or French goods? Any way, box it about and be done with it, and attend to us."

"Right, master, right, I am coming," the man answered, suddenly rousing himself; and opening the lower half of the door, he came heavily out. "At your service," he said. "But we have little company."

"The times are bad?"

"Ay, they looked a bit better six months back."

"But nothing came of it?"

"No, worse luck."

"And all that is called for now—is common Hollands, I suppose?"

The fellow grinned. "Right," he said. "You have the hang of it, master."

My companion slid to the ground, and began to remove his pistols and saddlebag. "Still you have some guests, I suppose?" he said.

"Ay, one," the man answered, slowly, and I thought, reluctantly.

"Is he, by any chance, a man of the name of—but never mind his name," Smith said. "Is he a surgeon?"

The hostler or host—for he had the air of play-

ing both parts—a big clumsy fellow, with immobile features and small eyes, looked at us thoughtfully and chewed a straw. “Well, may be,” he said, at last. “I never asked him.” And without more he took Smith’s horse by the rein and lurched through the door into the stable; the lanthorn swinging in his hand as he did so, and faintly disclosing a long vista of empty stalls and darkling roof. As I followed, leading in my sorry mare, a horse in a distant stall whinnied loudly.

“That is his hack, I suppose,” said Smith; and coolly taking up the lanthorn, which the other had that moment set down, he moved through the stable in the direction whence the sound had come.

The man of the house uttered something between an oath and a grunt of surprise; and letting fall the flap of the saddle which he had just raised that he might slacken the girths, he went after him. “Softly, master,” he said, “every man to his——”

But Smith was already standing with the lanthorn held high, gazing at a handsomely-shaped chestnut horse that pricking its ears turned a gentle eye on us and whinnied again. “Umph, not so bad,” my companion said. “His horse, I suppose?”

The man with the straw looked the animal over

reflectively. At length with something between a grunt and a sigh, "He came on it," he said.

"He won't go on it in a hurry."

"Why not?" said the man, more quickly than he had yet spoken; and he looked from the horse to my companion with a hint of hostility.

"Have you no eyes?" Smith answered, roughly. "The off-fore has filled; the horse is as lame as a mumper!"

"Gammon!" cried the other, evidently stung. And then, "You know a deal about horses in London! And never saw one or a blade of green grass, maybe, until you came Kent way!"

"As you please," Smith said, indifferently. "But my business is not with the horse but the master. So take us in, my good friend, and give us supper, for I am famished. And afterwards, if you please, we will see him."

"That is as he pleases," the fellow answered sulkily. But he raised no second objection, and when we had littered down the horses he led the way into the house by a back door, and so along a passage and down a step or two, which landed us in a room with a sanded floor, a fire, and a show of warmth and comfort, as welcome as it was unexpected. Here he left us to remove our cloaks, and we

presently heard him giving orders, and bustling the kitchen.

The floor of the room in which he had left us was sunk a little below the level of the road outside; and the ceiling being low and the window of greater width than height, and the mantel-shelf having for ornament a row of clean delft and pewter, I thought that no place had ever looked more snug and cosy. But whatever comfort I looked to derive from surroundings so much better than I had expected, was dashed by Smith's first words, who, as soon as we were alone came close to me under the pretence of unclasping my cloak, and in a low, guarded tone, and with a look of the grimmest, warned me to play my part.

"We go upstairs after supper, and in five minutes it will be done," he muttered. "Go through with it boldly, and in twenty-four hours you may be back in London. But fail or play me false, Mr. Price, and, by heaven, I put a ball through your head first, and my own afterwards. Do you mark me? Do you mark me, man?"

I whispered in abject nervousness—seeing that he was indeed in earnest—that I would do my best; and he handed me a ring which was doubtless the same that the Countess had given to her woman. It

had a great dog cut cameo-wise on the stone, which I think was an opal; and it fitted my finger not ill. But I had no more than time to glance at it before the host and his wife, a pale, scared-looking woman, came in with some bacon and eggs and ale, and as one or other of them stayed with us while we ate, and watched us closely, nothing more passed, Smith talking indifferently to them, sometimes about the fruit harvest, and sometimes in cant phrases about the late plot, the arrest of Hunt at Dymchurch (who had been used to harbour people until they had crossed), how often Gill's ship came over, Mr. Birkenhead's many escapes, and the like. Probably the man and woman were testing Smith; but if so, he satisfied them, for when we had finished our meal, and he asked openly if Sir John would see us, they raised no objection, but the man, taking a light from the woman's hand, led the way up a low-browed staircase to a room over that in which we had supped. Here he knocked, and a voice bidding us enter, Smith went in, and I after him, my heart beating furiously.

The room, which resembled the one beneath it in being low in the ceiling, looked the lower for the gaunt height of its one occupant, who had risen, and stood in the middle of the floor to receive us.

Thin and spare by nature, the meagre and rather poor-looking dress which he wore added to the singularity of his aspect. With a dry-as-dust complexion, and a three-days'-old beard, he had eyes light-coloured, quick-glancing, and sanguine, and notwithstanding the danger and uncertainty of his position, a fugitive in this wayside house, with a thousand guineas on his head—for I never doubted I was looking on Sir John Fenwick—his manner was at one moment arrogant and boastful, and at another dreamy. He had something of the air of a visionary; nor could anyone be long in his company without discerning that here was the very man for our purpose; one to whom all his geese were swans, and a clasp of the hand, if it marched with his hopes and wishes, of as much value as a pledge signed and sealed.

All this taken for granted, it is to be confessed that at first sight of us, his face fell, and his chagrin was unmistakable. "It is you, Smith, is it," he said, with a sigh. "Well, well, and I thought it was Birkenhead. Brown said it was not, but I thought that it must be. It is not everyone knows Birkenhead when he sees him."

"No, Sir John, that is true."

"However, I shall see him in the morning. I go

on board at New Romney at four, and doubtless he will be with Gill. When we come back——”

“Ah, Sir John, times will be changed then!” Smith said.

“They will, sir, with this Dutch crew and their low beast of a master swept into the sea! And gentlemen in their homes again! I have been amusing myself even now,” he continued, his eyes wandering to the table on which lay a litter of papers, an inkhorn, and two snuffy candles, “with plans for a new wing at Fenwick Hall, in the old style, I think, or possibly on the lines of the other house at Hexham. I am divided between the two. The Hall is the more commodious; the old Abbey has greater stateliness. However, I must put up my scripts now for I must be in the saddle in an hour. Have you commands for the other side of the water, Mr. Smith? If so I am at your service.”

Smith answered with a little hesitation, “Certainly, my business has to do with that, Sir John.” And he was proceeding to explain when the baronet, rubbing his hands in glee, cut him short.

“Ha! I thought so,” he cried, beaming with satisfaction. “Faith, it is so with everyone. They are all of a tale. My service, and my respects, and my duty—all to go you know where; and it is ‘Make it

straight for me, Sir John,' and 'You will tell the King, Sir John?' and 'Answer for me as for yourself, Sir John!' all day long when they can come at me. Why, man, you know something, but you would be surprised what messages I am carrying over. And when people have not spoken they have told me as much by a look; and those the least likely. Men who ten years ago were as black Exclusionists as old Noll himself!"

"I can believe it, Sir John," said Smith with gravity, while I, who knew how the late conspiracy had united the whole country in King William's defence, so that the man who refused to sign the Common's Association to that end went in peril of violence, listened with as much bewilderment as I had felt three minutes before, on hearing how this same man, a fugitive and an outlaw, bound beyond seas, had been employing his time!

However, he was as far from guessing what was in my mind as he was from doubting Smith's sincerity; and encouraged by the latter's assent he continued: "It is parlous strange to me, Mr. Smith, how the drunken Dutch boor stands a day! Strange and passing strange! But it cannot last. It will not last out the year. These executions have opened men's eyes finely! And by Christmas we shall be back."

"A merry Christmas it will be," said Smith. "Heaven grant it. But you have not asked, Sir John, who it is I have with me."

At that and at a sign he made me, I let fall the collar of the cloak I was wearing; which, in obedience to his directions, I had hitherto kept high about my chin. Sir John, his eyes drawn to me, as much by my action as by Smith's words, stared at me a moment before his mouth opened wide in recognition and surprise. Then, "I—I am surely not mistaken!" he cried, advancing a step, while the colour rose in his sallow face. "It is—it certainly is——"

"Sir John," Smith cried in haste, and, he, too, advanced a step and raised a hand in warning, "this is Colonel Talbot! Colonel Talbot, mark you, sir; I am sure you understand me, and the reasons which make it impossible for any but Colonel Talbot to visit you here. He has done me the honour to accompany me. But, perhaps," he continued, checking himself with an air of deference, "it were more fitting I left you now."

"No," I said hurriedly, repeating the lesson I had learned by rote, and in which Smith had not failed to practice me a dozen times that day. "I am here to one end only—to ask Sir John Fenwick to do Colonel Talbot a kindness; to take this ring and con-

vey it with my service and duty—whither he is going.”

“Oh, but this is extraordinary!” Sir John cried, lifting his hands and eyes in a kind of ecstasy. “This is a dispensation! A providence! But, my lord,” he continued with rapture, “there is one more step you may take, one more effort you may make. Be the restorer, the Monk of this generation! So ripe is the pear that were you to ride through the City to-morrow, and proclaim our rightful sovereign, not a citizen but would bless you, not a soldier but would throw down his pike! The Blues are with us to a man, and enraged besides at Keyes’s execution. And the rest of the army—do you dream that they see Dutch colonels promoted and Dutch soldiers overpaid, and do not resent it? I tell you, my lord—your Grace, I should say, for doubtless the King will confirm it.”

“Sir John,” I said hastily, assuming an anger I did not feel. “You mistake me. I am Colonel Talbot and no other. And I am here not to listen to plans or make suggestions, but to request a favour at your hands. Be good enough to convey that ring with my service whither you are going.”

“And that is all?” he cried reproachfully. “You will say no more?”

"That is all, sir," I answered; and then catching Smith's eye, I added, "Save this. You may add that, when the time comes, I shall know what to do, and I shall do it."

This time, sobered by my words and manner, he took in silence the ring I proffered; but having glanced at it, gave way to a second burst of rapture and jubilation, more selfish and personal than the first, but not less hearty. "This will be the best news Lord Middleton has had for a twelvemonth!" he cried gleefully. "And that I should succeed where I am told that he failed! Gad! I am the proudest man in England, your Grace—Colonel Talbot, I mean. We will pound Melfort and that faction with this! We will pound them to powder! He has wasted half a million and not got such an adherent! Good Lord, I shall not rest now until I am across with the news."

"Nor I—until Colonel Talbot is on the road again," said Smith, intervening deftly. "At the best this is no very safe place for him."

"That is true," said Sir John, with ready consideration. "And I should be riding within the half-hour. But to Romney. You, I suppose, return to London?"

"To London," I said, mechanically.

“Direct?” he said, with deference.

“As directly as we dare,” Smith answered; and with the word moved to the door and opened it. On which I bowed and was for going out; perhaps with a little awkwardness. But Sir John, too deeply impressed by the honour I had done him to let me retire so lamely, started forward, and snatching up a candle, would hold the door and light me; bending his long back, and calling to Brown to look to us—to look to us! Nor was this all; for when I halted half way down the stairs, and turned, feeling that such courtesy demanded some acknowledgement or at least a word of thanks, he took the word out of my mouth.

“Hist! Colonel Talbot!” he cried in a loud whisper; and leaning far over the stairs he held the light high with one hand and shaded his eyes with the other. “You know that we have the Tower?”

“The Tower?” I muttered, not understanding him.

“To be sure. Ailesbury has it in his hand. It will declare for us whenever he gets the word. But—you know it from him, I suppose?”

“From Lord Ailesbury?” I exclaimed in sheer surprise. “But he is a prisoner!”

Sir John winked. “Prisoner and master!” he muttered, nodding vigorously. “But there, I must

not keep you. Good luck and *bon voyage*, M. le duc."

Which was the last I saw of him for that time. Nor did I ever see him again save on one occasion. That he was a violent and factious man, and a foe to the Protestant succession I do not deny; nor that some passages in his life do him little credit, and the most bruited the least. But for all this, and though I was then even a stranger to him, I am fain to confess that as I stumbled down the stairs, and left the poor misguided gentleman alone in his mean room to pack up those plans for the extension of the old house that would never again own a Fenwick for its master, and so to set out on his dark journey, I felt as much pity for him, as loathing for the trickster who employed me. And so far was this carried and so much influence had it with me that when we reached the room below and the landlord having left us to see to the horses, Smith in his joy at our success clapped me on the shoulder, I shrank from his hand as if it burned me; shrank, and burst into childish tears of rage.

Naturally Smith, unable to comprehend, stared at me in astonishment. "Why man," he cried, "what is the matter? What ails you?"

"You!" I said. "You, curse you."

CHAPTER XIV.

AND doubtless it was this outbreak, or rather the suspicion of me which it sowed in Smith's mind, that occasioned the sequel of our adventure; for when he had cursed me for a fool and had put on his cloak, being now ready to go out, he seemed to be in two minds about it; as if he dared neither leave me where I was, lest I should communicate with Sir John, nor take me with him on his immediate errand. More than once he went to the door, and eying me askance and sourly, came back; but in the end and after standing a while irresolute, biting his nails, he made up his mind, and curtly bade me follow him.

"Do you think that I am to saddle for you, you whelp?" he cried. "Be stirring! and have a care, or I shall bore that hole in you yet. Take that bag and go before me. By G——, I wish you were at the bottom of the nearest horse-pond!"

His words had the effect he intended, of bringing me to my senses; but they went farther. For in

proportion as they cooled my temper they awakened my fears; and though I obeyed him abjectly, took up my bag and followed him, it was with a sudden and horrible distrust of his purpose. I saw that I had not only ceased to be of use to him, but was now in his way, and might be a danger to him, and the night—which enveloped us the moment we crossed the threshold and seemed the more dreary and forbidding for the ruddy light and comfort we left behind us—reminding me of the long dark miles I must ride by his side, each mile a terror to one and an opportunity to the other, I had much ado not to give way to instant panic there and then. However, for the time I controlled myself; and stumbling across the gloomy yard to the spot where a faint gleam of light indicated the door of the stables, I went in.

The landlord was saddling our horses; and a little cheered by the warmth of his lanthorn, I went to help him. Smith turned aside, as I thought, into the next stall. But Brown was sharper and more suspicious, and in a twinkling called to him lustily, to know what he was doing. Getting no answer, “Devil take him,” the landlord cried. “He cannot keep from that horse! Here, you! What are you doing there?”

“Coming!” Smith answered; but even as he spoke I caught the smart click of iron falling on iron, and the horse in the distant stall moved sharply with a hurried clatter of hoofs on the stones. “Coming!” Smith repeated. “What is the matter with you, man?”

“You had better come,” the landlord answered savagely. “Or I shall fetch you. Here you!” this to me, “lead yours out, will you. I want to see your backs, and be quit of you!”

I took my horse by the bridle, and led it out of the stable, while Brown went to bit the other. And so, being alone outside, and the moon rising at the moment over the roof of the house and showing me the open gates at the end of the yard, the impulse to escape from Smith while I had the opportunity came on me with overpowering force. Better acquainted than the landlord with the villain’s plans I had not a doubt that at that very moment he was laming Sir John’s horse for the purpose of detaining him; and the cold-blooded treachery of this act, filling me with as much terror on my own account—who might be the next victim—as hatred of the perpetrator, I climbed softly to my saddle, and began to walk my horse towards the gates. Doubtless Smith was too busy, cloaking his own movements, to

be observant of mine. I reached the gates unnoticed, and turning instinctively from London—in which direction I fancied that he would be sure to pursue me—I kicked my mare first into a quick walk, then into a cautious trot, finally into a canter. The beast, though far from speedy, was fresh from its corn; it took hold of the bit, shied at a chance light in a cotter's window, and went faster and faster, its ears pricked forward. In a minute we had left Ashford behind us, and were clattering through the moonlight. With one hand on the pommel and the other holding the shortened reins I urged the mare on with all the pressure of my legs; and albeit I trembled, now at some late-seen obstacle, which proved to be only the shadow of a tree, thrown across the road, and now at the steepness of a descent that appeared suddenly before me, I never faltered, but uphill and downhill drove in my heels, and with fear behind me, rode in the night as I had never before dared to ride in the daylight.

I had known nothing like it since the summer day twelve years before when I had fled across the Hertfordshire meadows on my feet. The sweat ran down me, I stooped in the saddle out of pure weakness; if the horse pricked its ears forward I spread mine backward listening for sounds of pursuit. But

such a speed could not be long maintained, and when we had gone, as I judged, two miles, the mare began to flag, and the canter became a trot. Still for another mile I urged her on, until feeling her labour under me, and foreseeing that I must ride far, I had the thought to turn into the first lane to which I came, and there wait in the shadow of a tree until Smith, if he followed, should pass.

I did this, sprang down, and standing by my panting horse, in a marshy hollow, some two hundred paces from the road, listened intently, for twenty minutes, it may be, but they seemed to be hours to me. After the life I had been leading in London, this loneliness in the night in a strange and wild place, and with a relentless enemy on my track, appalled my very soul. I was hot and yet I shivered, and started at the least sound. The scream of a curlew daunted me, the rustling of the rushes and sedge shook me, and when a sad wail, as of a multitude of lost souls passed overhead, I cowered almost to my knees. Yet, inasmuch as these sounds, doleful and dreary as they were, were all I heard, and the night air brought no trampling of distant hoofs to my ear, I had reason to be thankful, and more than thankful; and my mare having by this time got her wind again, I led her

back to the road, climbed into the saddle and plodded on steadily; deriving a wonderful relief and confidence from the thought that Smith had followed me Londonwards.

Moreover, I had conceived a sort of horror of the loneliness of the waste country-side, and to keep the highway was willing to run some risk. I took it that the road I was travelling must bring me to Romney, and for a good hour and a half, I jogged with a loose rein through the gloom, the way becoming ever flatter and wetter, the wind more chill and salt, and the night darker, the moon being constantly overcast by clouds. In that marshy district are few hamlets or farms, and those of the smallest, and very sparsely scattered. Once or twice I heard the bark of a distant sheep dog, and once far to the left I saw a tiny light and had the idea of making for it. But the reflection that a dozen great ditches, each wide enough and deep enough to smother my horse, might lie between me and the house, availed to keep me in the road; the more as I now felt sure from the saltiness of the night air that Romney and the sea were at no great distance in front of me. Presently indeed, I made out in front of me two moving lights, that I took to be those of ships riding at anchor, and my weary mare quickened her

pace as if she smelt the stable and the hayrack.

For five minutes after that I plodded on in the happy belief that my journey was as good as over, and I saved; and I let my mind dwell on shelter and safety, and a bed and food and the like, all awaiting me, as I fancied, in the patch of low gloom before me where my fancy pictured the sleeping town. Then on a sudden, my ear caught the dull beat of a horse's hoofs on the road behind me; and my heart standing still with terror, I plucked at my reins, and stood to listen. Ay, and it was no fancy; a moment satisfied me of that. Thud-thud, thud-thud, and then squash-squash, squish-squish! a horse was coming up behind me; and not only behind me, but hard upon me—within less than a hundred paces of me. The soft wet road had smothered the sound up to the last moment.

The rider was so close to me indeed, and I was so much taken by surprise that the moon sailing at that instant into a clear sky, showed me to him before I could set my horse going; and, as I started, whipping and spurring desperately, I heard the man shout. That was enough for me; plunging recklessly forward along the wet, boggy road, I flogged my horse into a jaded canter, and leaning low in the saddle in mortal fear of a bullet, closed my eyes to

the dangers that lay ahead, and thought only of escape from that which followed on my heels.

Suddenly, and while I was still kicking and urging on my horse, before the first flush of fear had left me, I heard a crash and a cry behind me; but I did not dare at the moment to look back. I only leaned the lower, and clung the more tightly to my horse's mane and still pressed on. By-and-by, however, hearing nothing, it flashed on me that I was riding alone, that I was no longer pursued; and a little later taking courage to draw rein and look back wearily, I found that I could see nothing, nor hear any sound save the heavy panting of my own horse. I had escaped. I had escaped and was alone on the marsh. But as I soon satisfied myself, I was no longer on the causeway along which I had been travelling when the man surprised me. The wind which had then met me was now on my right cheek; the lights for which I had been heading were no longer visible. The track, too, when I moved cautiously forward, seemed more wet and rough; after that it needed little to convince me that I had strayed from the highway, probably at the point where my pursuer had fallen.

This, since I dared not return by the way I had come, terribly perplexed me. I dismounted, and wet

and shivering stood by my horse, which hung its head, and restlessly lifted its feet by turns as if it already felt the engulfing power of the moss. Peering out every way I saw nothing but gloom and mist, the dark waste and unknown depths of the marsh. It was a situation to try the stoutest, nor did it need the mournful sough of the wind as it swept the flats, or the strange gurgling noises that from time to time rose from the sloughs about me to add the last touch of fear and melancholy to the scene.

Though, for my own part, I sank in no farther than my ankles, the horse by its restlessness evinced a strong sense of danger, and I dared not stand still. But as clouds had again obscured the moon and the darkness was absolute, to advance seemed as dangerous as to remain. However, in fear that the horse, if I stood where I was, would break loose from me, I led it forward cautiously: and then the track growing no worse but rather better, and the beast seeming to gain confidence as it proceeded, I presently took courage to remount again, and dropping the reins allowed it to carry me whither it would. This it did slowly and with infinite caution, smelling rather than feeling the way, and often stopping to try a doubtful spot. Observing how wonderfully the instinct of the beast aided it, and remembering that

I had once been told that horses feared nothing so much as to be smooored (as the fenmen call it), and would not willingly run that risk, I gained confidence myself; which the event justified, for by-and-by I caught the dull sound of sea-waves booming on a beach, and a few minutes afterwards discerned in the sky before me the first faint streaks of dawn.

Heaven knows how welcome it was to me! I was wet, weary and shivering with cold and with the aguish air of that dreary place; which is so unwholesome that I am told the natives take drugs to stave off the fever, as others do ale and wine. But at the sight I pricked up, and the horse too; and we moved on briskly; and presently by the help of the growing light, and through a grey mist which trebled the size of all objects, I saw a huge wall or bank loom across my path. I was close to it when I discerned it; and I had no more than time to despair of surmounting it, before the horse was already clambering up it. Scrambling and slipping among the stones, in a minute or so and with a great clatter we gained the summit; and saw below and before us the smooth milky surface of the sea lifting lazily under the fog.

So seen it had a strangely weird and pallid aspect, as of a dead sea, viewed in dreams: and I

stood a moment to breathe my horse and admire the spectacle; nor did I fail to thank God that I was out of that dreary and treacherous place. Then, considering my future movements and not knowing which way I ought to take—to right or left along the beach—to gain the more quickly help and shelter, I was reining my mare down the sea side of the bank when a welcome sound caught my ear. It was a man's voice giving an order. I halted and peered through the sea-haze; and by-and-by I made out a boat, lying beached at the edge of the tide, some hundred and fifty yards to my left. There were men standing in it, I could not see how many; and more were in the act of pushing it off the strand. Their voices came to me with singular clearness: but the words were unintelligible.

The sight gave me pause: and for a moment I stood reconnoitring the men. To advance or not was the question, and I was still debating it, and striving to deduce something from the men's appearance, when something, I never knew what—perhaps some noise ill-apprehended—led me to turn aside my head. Whatever the cause of the movement, it apprised me of something little suspected. Not fifty paces behind me I saw the figure of a giant horseman looming out of the mist. He was advancing

along the summit of the sea-wall below which I stood; hence I saw him before he made me out: and this gave me the start and the advantage. I had time to take in the thing, and seize my horse by the head, and move eight or ten paces towards the boat before he took the cue. Then on neither side was there any concealment. With a cry, a yell rather, the mere sound of which flung me into a panic, the man urged his horse down the bank shouting fiercely to me to stand; I in utter terror spurred mine across the beach towards the men I had seen.

I have said that I had some sixty yards of start, and two hundred or so to cross, to reach the boat; but the horses were scarcely able to trot; a yard was a furlong; and the sand swallowing up the sound of hoofs, it was a veritable race of ghosts, of phantoms, labouring through the mist across the flat, with the oily Stygian sea lapping the shore beside us. He cried out in the most violent fashion, now bidding me stay and now bidding the men stop me. And for all I know they might be in his pay, or at best be some of the reckless desperadoes who on that coast live by owling and worse practices. But they were my only hope and I too cried to them; and with joy I saw them put in again—they had before got afloat. Believing Smith to be gaining, I

cried pitifully to them to save me, and then my horse stumbling, I flung myself from the saddle, and plunged through the sand towards them. At that, two sprang out to meet me and caught me under my arms; and in a moment, amid a jargon of cries in a foreign tongue whipped me over the side into the boat. Then they pushed it off and leaped in themselves, wet to the thighs; and as my pursuer came lurching down the beach, a pistol drawn in his hand, a couple of powerful strokes drove the boat through the light surf. Waving frantically he yelled to the men to wait, and rode to his boot-soles into the water; but with a jeering laugh and a volley of foreign words the sailors pulled the faster and the faster, and the mist lying thick on the water, and the boat sitting low, in half a minute we lost the last glimpse of him and his passion, and rode outward on a grey boundless sea.

CHAPTER XV.

I SHOULD have been less than a man had I not thanked God for my escape. But it is in the sap of a tree to run upward in the spring, and in the blood of a man to live in the present and future, the past going for little; and I had not crouched two minutes on the thwart before the steady lurch of the boat outwards and seawards fixed my attention. From this to asking myself by what chance I had been saved, and who were the men who sat round me—and evinced no more curiosity about me than if they had been sent to the spot purely and simply to rescue me—was but a step.

I took it, scanned them stealthily, and was far from reassured; the sea-garb was then new to me, and these wearers of it were the wildest of their class. The fog which enfolded us magnified their clumsy shoulders and great knitted night-caps and the tarry ringlets that hung in festoons about their scarred and tanned faces. The huge gnarled hands that swung to and fro with the oars were no more

like human flesh than the sea-boots which the men wore, drawn high on their thighs. They had rings in their ears, and from all came a reek of tobacco, and salt-fish, and strange oaths; nor did it need the addition of the hanger and pistol which each wore in his belt to inform me that I had fallen once again among fierce and desperate men.

Dismayed by all I saw, it yet surprised me that no one questioned me. He who sat in the stern of the boat, and seemed to be in command, had a whistle continually at his lips, and his eyes on the curtain of haze before us; but if the tiller and navigation of the boat took up his thoughts, there were others. These, however, were content to pull on in silence, eyeing me with dull brutish stares, until the fog lifting disclosed on a sudden the hull of a tall ship looming high beside us. A shrill piping came from it—a sound I had heard before, but taken to be the scream of a sea-bird; and this, as we drew up, was followed by a hail. The man by my side let his whistle fall that he might answer—which he did, in French. A moment later our boat grated against the heaving timbers, and I, looking up through the raw morning air, saw a man in a boat-cloak spring on the bulwarks and wave his hat.

“Welcome!” he cried, lustily. “And God save

the King! A near thing they tell me, sir. But come on board, come on board, and we shall see Dunquerque the sooner. Up with you, Sir John, if you please, and let us be gone with the fog, and no heel-taps!"

Then, without another word, I knew what had happened; I knew why the boat which had picked me up, had been waiting on the beach at that hour; and as I rose to my feet on the seat, and clutched the rope ladder which the sailors threw down to me, my knees knocked together; for I foresaw what I had to expect. But the deck was surer ground for debate or explanation than the cockle-shell wherein I sat, and which tossed and ducked under me, threatening every moment to upset my stomach; and I went up giddily, grasped the bulwark, and, aided by half-a-dozen grinning seamen, night-capped and ringletted, I sprang down on the deck.

The man in the boat-cloak received me with a clumsy bow, and shook my hand. "Give you joy, Sir John!" he said. "Glad to see you, sir. I began to fear that you were taken! A little more, and I must have left you. But all's well that ends well, and—your pardon one moment."

With that he broke off, and shouted half-a-dozen

orders in French and English to the sailors; and in a moment the capstan, as I afterwards heard it called, was creaking round, and there was a hurry of feet, first to one side and then to the other, and a great shouting and a hauling at ropes. The ship heeled over so suddenly that if I had not caught at the rail I must have lost my footing, and for an instant the green seas seemed to swell up on a level with the slanting deck as if they would swallow us bodily. Instead, the sloop, still heeling over, began to gather way, and presently was hissing through the water, piling the white surf before it, only to pour it foaming to either side. The haze, like a moving curtain, began to glide by us; and looking straight ahead I saw a yellow glare that told of the sun rising over the French dunes.

The man who had received me, and who seemed to be the master, returned to my side. "We are under way, sir," he said, "and I am glad of it. But you will like to see Mr. Birkenhead? He would have met you, but the sea-colic took him as he lay on the swell outside Dunquerque whistling for a wind. He gets it badly one time, and one time he is as hearty as you are. He is better this morning, but he is ill enough."

I muttered that I would see him by-and-by,

when he was better. That I would lie down a little, and——

“Oh! I have got a bunk for you in his cabin,” the master answered briskly. “I thought you would want to talk State secrets. Follow me, if you please, and look to your sea-legs, sir.”

He led the way to a hatch or trap-door, and raising it began to descend. Not daring to refuse I followed him, down a steep ladder into the dark bowels of the ship, the reek of tar and bilge-water, cheese and old rum, growing stronger with every foot we descended. At the bottom of the ladder he pushed aside a sliding panel, and signed me to pass through the opening. I obeyed, and found myself in a sort of dog-hole—as it seemed to me who knew nothing of ships’ cabins—lighted only by a span-wide round window, so dark, therefore, that I stood a moment groping, and so close and foul-smelling that my gorge rose.

Out of the gloom came a groan as of a sick sheep. “Here is Sir John, safe and sound!” cried the master in his sea tones. “There is good medicine for you, Mr. Birkenhead.” And he peered into the darkness.

The only answer was a second groan. “Do you hear, sir?” the captain repeated. “Sir John is here.”

A voice feebly yet unmistakably d——d Sir John and the captain.

The master chuckled hoarsely. "Set a frigate behind us with a noose flying at the yard-arm, and there is no man like him!" he said. "None, Sir John; and I have carried him across seventy times and over, sick and well. He should know the road from the Marsh to Southwark if any man does. But let him be for the present, and do you lie down in the bunk above him, and I will bring you some Nantz and a crust. When he is better, he will be as glad to see you as if you were his brother."

I obeyed, and fortified by the strong waters he brought me, was glad to lie down, and under cover of darkness consider my position and what chance I had of extricating myself from it. For the time, and probably until we reached Dunquerque, I was safe; but what would happen when Birkenhead—the man whom the Jacobites called the Royal Post, and who doubtless knew Sir John Fenwick by sight—what would happen, I say, when he roused himself, and found that he had not only taken off the wrong man but left Sir John to his fate? Would he not be certain to visit the mischance on my head? Or if I escaped his hands, what must I expect, a stranger, ashore in a foreign land with little money, and no

language at my command? I shuddered at the prospect; yet shuddered more at the thought of Birkenhead's anger; so that presently all my fore-looking resolved itself into a strenuous effort to put off the evil day, and prolong by lying still and quiet the sleep into which he appeared to have fallen.

He lay so close to me, divided only by the one board on which I reclined, that all the noises of the ship—the creaking of the timbers, the wash of the seas as they foamed along the quarter, and the banging of blocks and ropes—noises that never ceased, failed to cover the sound of his breathing. And this nearness to me, taken with the fact that I could not see him, so tormented me with doubt whether he was awake or asleep, was recovering or growing worse, that more than once I raised my head and listened until my neck ached. In the twilight of the cabin I could see his cloak swaying lazily on a hook; on another hung a belt with pistols, that slid this way and that with the swing of the vessel. And presently watching these and listening to the regularity of his breathing, I laid my head down and did the last thing I proposed to do or should have thought possible; for I fell asleep.

I awoke with a man's hand on my shoulder; and sat up with a start of alarm, a man's voice in my

ear. The floor of the cabin slanted no longer, the cloak and sword-belt hung motionless on the wall; and in place of the sullen splash of the waves and the ceaseless creaking of joists and knees, that had before filled the inwards of the ship, a medley of shouts and cries, as shrill as they were unintelligible, filled the pauses of the windlass. These things were, and I took them in and drew the inference, that we were in harbour; but mechanically, for it seemed, at the moment, that such wits as terror left me were in the grasp of the man who shook me and swore at me by turns; and whose short hair—for he was wigless—fairly bristled with rage and perplexity.

“You! Who the devil are *you*?” he cried, frantically. “What witchcraft is this? Here, Gill! Gill! Do you hear, you tarry pudding-head? Who is this you have put in my cabin? And where is Fenwick? Where——”

“Where is Sir John?” cried a voice somewhat distant, as if the speaker stooped to the hatchway. “He is there, Mr. Birkenhead. I set him there myself. And between gentlemen, such words as those, Mr. Birkenhead——”

“As what?” cried the man who held me.

“As tarry. But never mind; between friends——”

“Friends be hanged!” cried my assailant with

violence. "Who is this fool? That is what I asked. And you, have you no tongue?" he continued, glaring at me. "Who are you, and where is Sir John Fenwick?"

Before I could answer, the master, who had descended, crowded himself into the doorway. "That is Sir John," he said, sulkily. "I thought that you——"

"This, Sir John?" the other exclaimed.

"Ay, to be sure."

"As much Sir John as you are the warming-pan!" Birkenhead retorted; and released me with so much violence that my head rapped against the panels. "This, Sir John Fenwick?" And then, "Oh, man, man, you have destroyed me," he cried. "Where is my reputation now? You have left the real Simon Pure to be taken, and brought off this—this—you booby, you grinning ape, who are you?"

Trembling, I told him my name.

"And Sir John?" he said. "Where is he?"

"I left him at Ashford," I muttered.

"It is a lie!" he cried in a voice that thrilled me to the marrow. "You did not leave him at Ashford! He was with you on the beach—he was with you and you deserted him! You left him to be taken, and saved yourself. You wretch! You Judas!"

God knows by what intuition he spoke. For me, I swear that it was not until that moment, not until he had put the possibility into words that I knew—ay, knew, for that was the only word, so certain was I after the event—that the man who had ridden down the beach and called vainly on the sailors to wait, the man from whom we had rowed away laughing, taking with us his last hope of life, was not Matthew Smith, but Sir John Fenwick! *Now*, things which should have opened my eyes then, and had not, came back to me. I recalled how tall and gaunt the rider had looked through the haze, and a something novel in his voice, and plaintive in his tone. True, I had heard the click-clack of Smith's horse's shoes as clearly as I ever heard anything in my life; but if Sir John, alarmed by the sound of my hasty departure, and fearing treachery, had sallied out, and leaping on the first horse he found, had ridden after me, then all was clear.

I saw that, and cowered before the men's accusing eyes: so that they had been more than Solomons had they taken my sudden disorder for aught but guilt—guilt brought home. For Birkenhead, his rage was terrible. He seized me by the throat, and disregarding my pitiful pleas that I had not known, I had not known, he dragged me from the berth, and made as

if he would choke me there and then with his naked hands. Instead, however, he suddenly loosed me. "Faugh," he cried; "I will not dirty my hands with you! That such as you—you should be a man's death! *You!* But you shall not escape. Gill, up with him! Up with him and to the yard-arm. String him up! He shall swing before he is an hour older!"

"In Dunquerque harbour?" said the other.

"Why not?"

"Why not?" said the master. "Because, Mr. Birkenhead, I serve a King *de jure* and not *de facto*. That is why not. And if you want another reason——"

"Well?"

"I am not aware that His Majesty has raised you to the Bench," the master answered sturdily.

"Oh, you have turned sea-lawyer, have you?"

"Law is law," said the shipmaster. "England, or France, or the high seas."

"And owling is owling!" the other retorted with passion. "And smuggling, smuggling! You are a fine man to talk! If you will not hang him—as they will hang Fenwick, so help me, never doubt it!—what will you do with him?"

"Give my men a bag of sand apiece, and let him

run the gauntlet," the captain answered, with a phlegm that froze me. "Trust me, sir, they will not leave much of a balance owing."

It was terrible to see how Birkenhead, vain, choleric and maddened by disappointment, jumped at the cruel suggestion. For me, I shrank into the bunk into the farthest corner, and cried for mercy; I might as well have cried to the winds. I was hauled out, the word passed up, and despite my desperate struggles, prayers and threats—the latter not unmingled with the name of Shrewsbury, which did but harden them—I was dragged to the foot of the ladder. Thence I was carried on deck, where, half-dead with fear and powerless in the hands of three stout seamen, I met none but grinning faces and looks of cruel anticipation. Few need to be told with what zest the common herd flock to a scene of cruel sport, how hard are their bosoms, how fiendish the pleasure which all but the most humane and thoughtful take in helpless suffering. Small was the chance that my pleas of innocence and appeals for a hearing would gain attention. All was ready, the men bared their arms and licked their lips, and in a moment I must have been set for the baiting.

But in certain circumstances the extremity of fear is another name for the extremity of daring; and the

master, at this last moment going to range the crew in two lines, and one of the sailors who had me in charge releasing me for an instant, that he might arm himself with a sand-bag, I saw my opportunity. With a desperate swing I wrenched myself from the grasp of the other men. That done, a single bound carried me to the plank which joined the deck to the shore. I flew across it, swift as the wind; and as the whole crew seeing what had happened broke from their stations and with yells and whoops of glee took up the chase, I sprang on shore. Bursting recklessly through the fringe of idlers whom the arrival of the ship had brought to the water's edge, I sped across the open wharf, threaded a labyrinth of bales and casks, and darted up the first lane to which I came.

Fear gave me wings, and I left the wharf a score of yards ahead of my pursuers. But the seamen, who had taken up the chase with the gusto of boys let loose from school, made up for the lack of speed by whooping like demons; and the English among them halloing "Stop Thief!" and the others some French words alike in import, the alarm went abreast of me. Fortunately the lane was almost deserted, and I easily evaded the half-hearted efforts to stop me, which one or two made. It seemed that I should for the present get away. But at the last moment,

at the head of the lane fate waited for me: an old woman standing in a doorway—and who made, as I came up, as if she was afraid of me—flung a bucket after me. It fell in front of me, I trod on the edge and fell with a shriek of pain.

Before I could rise or speak, the foremost of the sailors came up and struck me on the head with a sand-bag; and the others as they arrived rained blows on me without mercy. I managed to utter a cry, then instinctively covered my head with my arms. They belaboured me until they were tired and I almost senseless; when, thinking me dead, they went off whistling, and I crawled into the nearest doorway and fainted away.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN I recovered my senses I was on my back in one of eighteen beds, in a long white-walled room, having barred windows, and a vaulted ceiling. A woman, garbed strangely in black, and with a queer white cap drawn tight round her face, leaned over me, and with her finger laid to her lips, enjoined silence. Here and there along the wall were pictures of saints; and at the end two candles burned before a kind of altar. I had an idea that I had been partly conscious, and had lain tossing giddily with a burning head, and a dreadful thirst through days and nights of fever. Now, though I could scarcely raise my head, and my brain reeled if I stirred, I was clear-minded, and knew that the bone of my leg was broken, and that for that reason I had a bed to myself where most lay double. For the rest I was so weak I could only cry in pure gratitude when the nun came to me in my turn, and fed me, and plain, stout, and gentle-eyed, laid her fingers on her lip, or smiling, said in her odd English "Quee-at, quee-at, monsieur!"

In face of the blessings which the Protestant Succession, as settled in our present House of Hanover, has secured to these islands, it would little become me to find a virtue in papistry; and my late lord, who early saw and abjured the errors of that faith, would have been the last to support or encourage such a thesis. Notwithstanding which, I venture to say that the devotion of these women to their calling is a thing not to be decried, merely because we have no counterpart of it, nor the charity of that hospital, simply because the burning of candles and worshipping of saints alternate with the tendance of the wretched. On the contrary, it seems to me that were such a profession, the idolatrous vows excepted, grafted on our Church, it might redound alike to the credit of religion—which of late the writings of Lord Bolingbroke have somewhat belittled—and to the good of mankind.

So much with submission; nor will the most rigid of our divines blame me, when they learn that I lay ten weeks in the *Maison de Dieu* at Dunquerque, dependent for everything on the kind offices of those good women; and nursed during that long period with a solicitude and patience not to be exceeded by that of wife or mother. When I had so far recovered as to be able to leave my bed, and move a

few yards on crutches, I was assisted to a shady courtyard, nestled snugly between the hospital and the old town wall. Here, under a gnarled mulberry tree which had sheltered the troops of Parma, I spent my time in a dream of peace, through which nuns, apple-faced and kind-eyed, flitted laden with tisanes, or bearing bottles that called for the immediate attention of M. le Medecin's long nose and silver-rimmed spectacles. Occasionally their Director would seat himself beside me, and silently run through his office: or instruct me in the French tongue, and the evils of Jansenism—mainly by means of the snuff-box which rarely left his fine white hands. More often the meagre apothecary, young, yellow, dry, ambitious, with a hungry light in his eyes, would take an English lesson, until the coming of his superior routed him, and sent him to his gallipots and compounding with a flea in his ear.

Such were the scenes and companions that attended my return to health; nor, my spirits being attuned to these, should I have come to seek or desire others, though enhanced by my native air—a species of inertia, more easily excused by those who have viewed French life near at hand, than by such as have never travelled—but for an encounter as im-

portant in its consequences as it was unexpected, which broke the even current of my days.

It was no uncommon thing for the nuns to bring one of my own countrymen to me, in the fond hope that I might find a friend. But as these persons, from the nature of the case, were invariably Jacobites, and either knowing something of my story, thought me well served, or coming to examine me, shied at the names of Mr. Brome and Lord Shrewsbury, such efforts had but one end. When I heard, therefore, for the fourth or fifth time that a compatriot of mine, amiable, and of a vivacity *tout-à-fait merveilleuse* was coming to see me, I was as far from supposing that I should find an acquaintance, as I was from anticipating the interview with pleasure. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when Sœur Marie called me into the garden at the appointed time; and, her simple face shining with delight, led me to the old mulberry tree, where, who should be sitting but Mary Ferguson!

She had as little expected to meet me as I to meet her, but coming on me thus suddenly, and seeing me lame, and in a sense a cripple, reduced, moreover, by the long illness through which I had passed, she let her feelings have way. Such tenderness as she had entertained for me before welled up now with

irresistible force, and giving the lie to a certain hoydenish hardness, inherent in a disposition which was never one of the most common, in a moment she was in my arms. If she did not weep herself, she pardoned, and possibly viewed with pleasure, those tears on my part, which weakness and surprise drew from me, while a hundred broken words and exclamations bore witness to the gratitude she felt on the score of her escape.

Thus brought together, in a strange country, and agitated by a hundred memories, nothing was at first made clear, except that we belonged to one another, and Sœur Marie had long fled to carry the tale with mingled glee and horror into the house, before we grew sufficiently calm to answer the numberless questions which it occurred to each to ask.

At length Mary, pressed to tell me how she had fared since her escape, made one of the odd faces I could so well remember. And "Not as I would, but as I could," she said, dryly. "By crossing with letters."

"Crossing?" I exclaimed.

"To be sure," she answered. "I go to and from London with letters."

"But should you be taken?" I cried, with a vivid

remembrance of the terror into which the prospect of punishment had thrown her.

She shrugged her shoulders; yet suppressed, or I was mistaken, a shudder. Then "What will you?" she said, spreading out her little hands French fashion, and making again that odd grimace. "It is the old story. I must live, Dick. And what can a woman do? Will Lady Middleton take me for her children's *gouvernante*? Or Lady Melfort find me a place in her household? I am Ferguson's niece, a backstairs wench of whom no one knows anything. If I were handsome now, *bien!* As I am not—to live I must risk my living."

"You are handsome enough for me!" I cried.

She raised her eyebrows, with a look in her eyes that, I remember, puzzled me. "Well, may be," she said a trifle tartly. "And the other is neither here nor there. For the rest, Dick, I live at Captain Gill's, and his wife claws me Monday and kisses me Tuesday."

"And you have taken letters to London?" I said, wondering at her courage.

"Three times," she answered, nodding soberly. "And to Tunbridge once. A woman passes. A man would be taken. So Mr. Birkenhead says. But——" and with the word she broke off abruptly, and stared

at me; and continued to stare at me, her face which was rounder and more womanly than in the old days, falling strangely.

It wore such a look indeed, that I glanced over my shoulder thinking that she saw something. Finding nothing, "Mary!" I cried. "What is it? What is the matter?"

"Are you the man who came with Sir John Fenwick to the shore?" she cried, stepping back a pace—she had already risen. "And betrayed him? Dick! Dick, don't say it!" she continued hurriedly, holding out her hands as if she would ward off my words. "Don't say that you are *that* man! I had forgotten until this moment whom I came to see; who, they said, was here."

Her words stung me, even as her face frightened me. But while I winced a kind of courage, born of indignation and of a sense of injustice long endured, came to me; and I answered her with spirit. "No," I said, "I am not that man."

"No?" she cried.

"No!" I said defiantly. "If you mean the man that betrayed Sir John Fenwick. But I will tell you what man I am—if you will listen to me."

"What are you going to tell me?" she answered,

the troubled look returning. And then, "Dick, don't lie to me!" she cried quickly.

"I have no need," I said. And with that, beginning at the beginning, I told her all the story which is written here, so far as it was not already known to her. She listened in silence, standing over me with something of the severity of a judge, until I came to the start from London with Matthew Smith.

There she interrupted me. "One moment," she said in a hard voice; and she fixed me with keen, unfriendly eyes. "You know that Sir John Fenwick was taken two days later, and is in the Tower?"

"I know nothing," I said, holding out my hands and trembling with the excitement of my story, and the thought of my sufferings.

"Not even that?"

"No, nothing; not even that," I said.

"Nor that within a month, in all probability, he will be tried and executed!"

"No."

"Nor that your master is in peril? You have not heard that Sir John has turned on him and denounced him before the Council of the King?"

"No," I said. "How should I?"

"What?" she cried incredulously. "You do not

know that with which all England is ringing—though it touches you of all men?”

“How should I?” I said feebly. “Who would tell me here? And for weeks I have been ill.”

She nodded. “Go on,” she said.

I obeyed. I took up the thread again, told her how we reached Ashford, how I saw Sir John, how I fled, and how I was pursued; finally how I was received on board the boat, and never, until the following day, when Birkenhead flung it in my teeth, guessed that I had forestalled Sir John, and robbed him of his one chance of escape. “For if I had known,” I continued warmly, “why should I fly from him? What had I to fear from him? Or what to gain, if Smith with a pistol were not at my heels, by leaving England? Gain?” I continued bitterly, seeing that I had convinced her. “What *did* I gain? This! This!” And I touched my crippled leg.

“Thank God!” she said, with emotion. “Thank God, Dick. But——”

“But what?” I retorted sharply; for in the telling of the story I had come to see more clearly than before how cruelly I had been treated. “But what?”

“Well, just this,” she said gently. “Have you not brought it on yourself in a measure? If you

had been more—that is, I mean, if you had not been so——”

“So what?” I cried querulously, seeing her hesitate.

“Well, so quick to think that it was Matthew Smith—and a pistol,” she answered, smiling rather heartlessly. “That is all.”

“There was a mist,” I said.

She laughed in her odd way. “Of course, Dick, there was a mist,” she agreed. “And you cannot make bricks without straw. And after all you did make bricks in St. James’s Square, and it is not for me to find fault. But there is a thing to be done, and it must be done.” And her lips closed firmly, after a fashion I remembered, and still remember, having seen it a hundred times since that day, and learned to humour it. “One that must be done!” she continued. “Dick, you will not leave the Duke to be ruined by Matthew Smith? You will not lie here and let those rogues work their will on him? Sir John has denounced him.”

“And may denounce me!” I said, aghast at the notion. “May denounce me,” I continued with agitation. “*Will* denounce me. If it was not the Duke who was at Ashford, it was I!”

“And who are you?” she retorted, with a look

that withered me. "Who will care whether you met Sir John at Ashford or not? King William—call him Dutchman, boor, drunkard, as it's the fashion this side, call him I say what you will—at least he flies at high game, and does not hawk at mice!"

"Mice?"

"Ay, mice!" she answered with a snap of her teeth—and she looked all over the little vixen she could be. "For what are we? What are we now? Still more, what are we if we leave the Duke to his enemies, leave him to be ruined and disgraced, leave him to pay the penalty, while you, the cause of all this, lie here—lie safe and snug? For shame, Dick! For shame!" she continued with such a thrill in her voice that the pigeons feeding behind her fluttered up in alarm, and two or three nuns looked out inquisitively.

I had my own thoughts and my own feelings about my lord, as he well knew in after years. I challenge any to say that I lacked either respect or affection for him. But a man's wits move more slowly than a woman's, and the news came on me suddenly. It was no great wonder if I could not in a moment stomach the prospect of returning to risk and jeopardy, to the turmoil from which I had been so long freed, and the hazards of a life and death

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struggle. In the political life of twenty years ago men carried their necks to market. Knowing that I might save the Duke and suffer in his place—the fate of many a poor dependant; or might be confronted with Smith; or brought face to face with Ferguson; or perish before I reached London in the net in which my lord's own feet were caught, I foresaw not one but a hundred dangers; and those such as no prudent man could be expected to regard with equanimity, or any but a hare-brained girl would encounter with a light heart.

Still I desired to stand well with her; and that being so I confess that it was with relief I remembered my lameness; and named it to her. Passing over the harshness of her last words, "You are right," I said. "Something should be done. But for me it is impossible at present. I am lame, as you see."

"Lame?" she cried.

"More than lame," I answered—but there was that in her tone which bade me avoid her eyes. "A cripple, Mary."

"No, not a cripple," she answered.

"Yes," I said.

"No, Dick," she answered in a voice low, but so grave and firm that I winced. "Let us be frank for once. Not a cripple, but a coward."

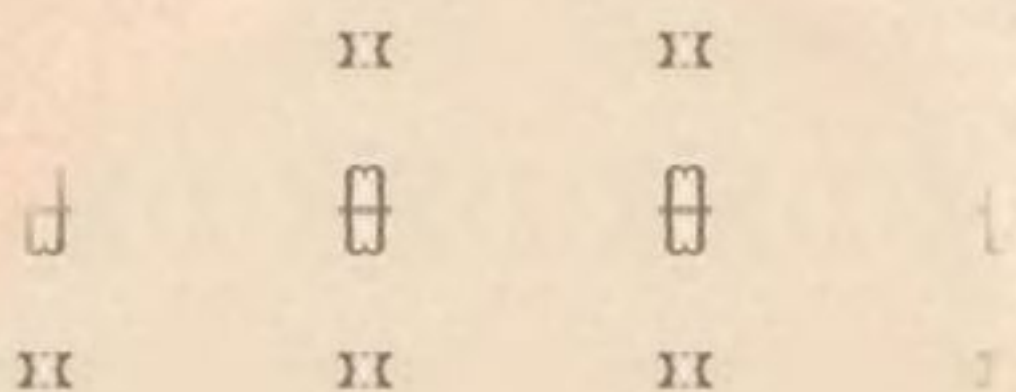
"I never said I was a soldier," I answered.

"Nor I," she replied, wilfully misunderstanding me. "I said, a coward! And a coward I will not marry!"

With that we looked at one another: and I saw that her face was white. "Was it a coward saved your life—in the Square?" I muttered at last.

"No," she answered. "But it was a coward played the sneak for Ferguson. And a coward played the rogue for Smith! It was a coward lost Fenwick—because he dare not look behind! And a coward who will now sacrifice his benefactor, to save his own skin. And *you* only know in how many other things you have played the craven. But the rather for that, up, now, and play the man! You have a chance now! Do this one brave thing and all will be forgiven. Oh, Dick, Dick!" she continued—and with a sudden blaze in her face she stooped and threw her arms round me, "if you love me, do it! Do it for us both! Do it—or if you cannot, God knows it were better we were hung, than married!"

I cannot hope to describe the fervour, which she threw into these last words, or the effect which they wrought on me, weakened as I was by long illness. In a voice broken by tears I conjured her to give



me time—to give me time; a few days in which to consider what I would do.

“Not a day!” she answered, springing from me in fresh excitement, and as if my touch burned her. “I will give you no time. You have had a lifetime, and to what purpose? I will give you no time. Do you give me your word.”

“To go to England?”

“Yes.”

I was ashake from head to foot; and groaned aloud. In truth if I had known the gallows to be the certain and inevitable end of the road, on which I was asked to enter, I could not have been more sorely beset; between rage and fear, and shame of her and desire for her. But while I hung in that misery, she continuing to stand over me, I looked, as it happened, in her face; and I saw that it was no longer hot with anger, but sad and drawn as by a sharp pain. And I gave her my word, trembling and shaking.

“Now,” said she, “are you a brave man; and perhaps the bravest.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT the arrest of Sir John Fenwick, reported in London on the 13th of June, was regarded by all parties as an event of the first magnitude, scarce exceeded in importance by a victory in Flanders or a defeat in the Mediterranean, is a thing not to be denied at this time of day; when men, still in their prime, can recall the commotion occasioned by it. The private animosity, which was believed to exist between Sir John and the King, and which dated, if the gossip of Will's and Garraway's went for anything, not from the slight which he had put upon the late Queen, but from a much earlier period, when he had served under William in Flanders, aroused men's curiosity, and in a sense their pity; as if they were to see here the end of a Greek drama.

Nor, apart from the public and general interest, which Sir John's birth and family connections, no less than his share in the plot, considerably augmented, was there any faction which could view his arrest with indifference. He had been so deep

in the confidence of St. Germain's that were he to make a discovery, not Tories and Jacobites only lay at his mercy, but all that large class among the Whigs who had stooped to palter with James. These, as they were the more culpable had also more to fear. Trembling at the prospect of a disclosure which must convict them of practices at variance with their most solemn professions, they were supported by none of those sentiments of loyalty, honourable if mistaken, which excused the others; while as each fondly thought his perfidy unknown to his neighbour, and dreaded nothing so much as detection by the rank and file of the party, he found the burden of apprehension weigh the more heavily, because he had none to share it with him.

The absence of the King, who was campaigning in Flanders, aggravated the suspense; which prevailed so widely for the reasons above, and others, that it is not too much to say that barely four politicians could be found of the first or second rank who were not nearly concerned in the question of Sir John Fenwick's silence. Of these, however, I make bold to say that my lord was one; and though the news that Sir John, who lay in the Tower, had sent for the Duke of Devonshire may have excited a passing feeling of jealousy in his mind—since he and not

the other Duke was the person to whom Sir John might more fitly unbosom himself—I am confident, and, indeed, had it from his own lips, that at this time he had no notion of any danger threatening himself.

His eyes were first opened by the Earl of Marlborough; who, calling upon him one day, ostensibly on business connected with the Princess Anne (to whom the King had been reconciled before his departure), presently named Sir John. From this to the statement made to the Duke of Devonshire, and the rumours of its contents which filled the coffee-houses, was but a step. The Earl seemed concerned; my lord, in his innocence, sceptical.

At length the latter spoke out what was in his mind. “To tell you the truth, my lord,” he said frankly, “I think it is a mare’s nest. I don’t believe that any statement has been made.”

The Earl looked astonished. “May I ask why not?” he said.

“Because, unless I am much mistaken,” my lord answered smiling, “the Duke would have brought it straight to me. And I have heard nothing of it.”

“You have not asked the Duke?”

“Of course not.”

"But—he was with Sir John," the Earl persisted steadily. "There is no doubt of that, is there?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, then, is not that in itself strange?"

"I think not, there have always been friendly relations," my lord continued, "between the Duke and Sir John."

"Just so," Lord Marlborough answered, taking a pinch of snuff. "Still, do those relations warrant the Lord Steward in visiting him now?"

The Secretary looked a little startled. "Well, I don't know," he said. "But the Duke of Devonshire's patriotism is so well established——"

"That he may steal the horse, while we look over the wall," Lord Marlborough answered, taking him up with a smile. "Be that as it may," he continued, "and I am sure that the same may be said of the Duke of Shrewsbury,"—here the two noblemen bowed to one another—"I think your Grace's information is somewhat faulty on this point. I happen to know that immediately after the interview a special messenger left Devonshire House for Loo; and that the matters he carried were reduced into writing by his Grace's own hand. That being so,

Duke, you are better qualified to draw the inference than I am."

My lord, at that, looked grave and nodded, being convinced; and I do not doubt that he felt the slight which the other Duke's silence implied. But though, of all the men I have ever met, he was the most sensitive, he was the last also, to wear his heart on his sleeve; and not only did he refrain from complaint of his colleague's conduct, but he hastened to dispel by a word or two the effect of his momentary gravity. "Ah, then I can guess what happened," he said, nodding his comprehension. "I have no doubt that Sir John made it a term that his discovery should be delivered to the King at first hand—and to no one else."

Lord Marlborough rose. "Duke," he said firmly, "I think it is fair that I should be more frank with you. The reason you give is not the reason they are giving in the coffee-houses—for the Lord Steward's reticence."

"No!" said my lord, with a faint note of scorn in his voice.

"No," said the Earl. "On the contrary, they say at Will's—and for the matter of that at the St. James's too, that the statement is kept close because it touched men in power."

"In power?" said my lord, with the same note in his voice. "In the Council, do you mean?"

"Yes; three men."

"Do they name them?"

"Certainly," said my Lord Marlborough, smiling. "And they join with the three one who is not in power."

"Ah!"

"Myself."

Nothing could exceed the placid indifference, as natural as it was free from exaggeration, which the Earl contrived to throw into his last word. Yet my lord started, and shuffled uneasily in his chair. Knowing something, and perhaps suspecting more, aware of the character which his enemies attributed to Lord Marlborough, he would not have been the statesman he was, if he had not fancied an ulterior design, in an admission not a little embarrassing. He confined himself, therefore, to a polite shrug expressive of incredulity, and to the words "*Credat Judæus.*"

"Just so," said Lord Marlborough, whose erudition was not on a par with the marvellous strategical powers he has since displayed. "What, then, will your Grace say—to Ned Russell?"

"The First Lord of the Admiralty? Is *he* named?"

"In the coffee-houses."

"Ah!"

"Lord Godolphin!"

"Impossible!"

"Not so impossible as the fourth," Lord Marlborough answered, with a light laugh, in which courtesy, amusement, and a fine perception of the ridiculous were nicely mingled. "Can you not guess, Duke?"

But my lord, too prudent to suggest names in that connection, shook his head. "Who could?" he said, raising his eyebrows scornfully. "They might as well name me, as some you are mentioning."

Lord Marlborough laughed softly. "My very dear Duke," he said, "that is just what they are doing! They do name you. You are the fourth."

I believe that my lord had so little expected the answer that for a space he remained, staring at the speaker, in equal surprise and dismay. Then his indignation finding vent: "It is not possible!" he cried. "Even in the coffee-houses! And besides, if your story is true, my lord, the Duke of Devonshire alone knows what Sir John has discovered, and whom he has accused!"

Lord Marlborough pursed up his lips. "Things

get known—strangely,” he said. “For instance, the shadow which came between your Grace and His Majesty in ’90—probably you supposed it to be known to the King only, or if to any besides, to Portland at most? On the contrary, there was scarce a knot of chatterers at Garraway’s but whispered of your dinners with Middleton, and meetings with Montgomery, watched for the event, and gave the odds on St. Germain’s in guessing.”

The Earl spoke in his airiest manner, took snuff *in medio*, and with a carelessness that none could so well affect, avoided looking at his hearer. Nevertheless, the shaft went home. My lord, smitten between the joints of his harness, suffered all that a proud and sensitive man, apprised on a sudden that his dearest secrets were the property of the marketplace, could suffer; and rage dissipating the composure which self-respect would fain have maintained, “My lord, this is going too far!” he gasped. “Who gave your lordship leave to—to touch on a matter which concerns only myself?”

“Simply this later matter,” the Earl answered in a plain, matter-of-fact tone that at once sobered the Duke, and seemed to justify his own interference. “If there is anything at all in this rumour—if Sir

John has really said anything, I take it that the old gossip is at the bottom of it."

The Duke stared before him with a troubled face; and did not answer. To some it might have seemed the most natural course to carry the war into the informant's country, and by a dry question or a pregnant word suggest that at least as good grounds existed for the imputation cast on *him*. But such a line of argument was beneath the dignity, which was never long wanting, to my lord; and he made no attempt to disturb the other's equanimity or question his triumph. After a time, however, "I beg your pardon," he said. "I forgot myself and spoke hastily. But he is a most impudent fellow!"

"A d——d impudent fellow," the Earl cried, with more fervour than he had yet exhibited.

"And he is playing an impudent game," my lord continued, thoughtfully. "But a dangerous one."

"As he will find to his cost, before he has done!" Lord Marlborough answered. "It is cunningly thought of. If he will save his head he must give up someone. So, as he will not give up his friends he will ruin his enemies; if the King is a fool, and can spare us."

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"The King is no fool!" said the Duke, rather coldly. It was no secret that between William and Lord Marlborough love was not lost.

"Well, that may be a good thing for us!" the Earl answered lightly. He had not the reputation even with his friends of setting his feelings before his interest; nor probably in all England was there a man who looked out on the world with a keener eye to benefit by the weaknesses of men and make profit of their strength.

I know that it ill-becomes one in my station to carp at the great Duke, as men now style him; though of all his greatness, genius, and courage, there remains but a poor drivelling childishness, calling every minute for a woman's tendance. And far am I from giving voice or encouragement to the hints of those, who, hating him, maintain that in future times things incredibly base will be traced to his door. But truth is truth; that he knew more of the matter now threatening and stood to lose more by it than my lord, I have little doubt; nor that this being so, the real object of his visit was to ensure the solidity of the assailed phalanx, and particularly to make it certain that the Secretary, whose weight with the King was exceeded only by his popularity

with the party, should not stand aloof from the common hazard.

Having attained this object, so far as it could be obtained in a single interview, and finding that the Duke, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, continued moody and distraught, he presently took his leave. But to my lord's astonishment, he was announced again ten minutes later. He re-entered with profuse apologies.

"I went from your Grace's to the Venetian Ambassador's on the farther side of the Square," he said. "There I heard it confidently stated that Goodman, one of the two witnesses against Sir John, had absconded. Have you heard it, Duke?"

"No," my lord answered with some dryness. "And I am sure that it is not true."

"You would have heard it?"

"Necessarily."

"Nevertheless, and craving your pardon," the Earl answered slowly, "I think that there is something in it. If he has not been induced to go, I fancy from what I hear that he is hesitating."

"Then he must be looked to."

"Yet! were he to go, you see—it would make all the difference—to Sir John," the Earl said. "There

would be only Porter; and the Act requires two witnesses."

My lord lifted his eyebrows; that two witnesses were required in a case of treason was too trite a statement to call for comment. Then seeing the other's drift, he smiled. "That were to lick the platter, my lord, in order to keep the fingers clean," he said.

Lord Marlborough laughed airily. "Well put," he said, not a whit abashed. "So it would. You are right, Duke, as you always are. But I have detained you too long." With which, and another word of apology, he took his leave a second time.

That he left an unhappy man behind him, none can doubt, who knew the Duke's sensitive nature, and respect for his high position and dignity. To find that the weakness, venial and casual, of which he had been guilty years before in stooping to listen to Lord Middleton's solicitations—a fault which he had fancied known only to the King and by him forgiven—to find that this was the property of the public, was burden enough; but to learn that on this was to be founded a fresh charge, for the proper refutation of which the past must be raked up, was torture intolerable. In a fine sense of the ridiculous, my lord excelled any man of his time; he could

feather therefore out of his own breast the shafts of evil that would be aimed at the man, who, one of the seven to bring over William in '88, had stooped in '89 to listen to the Exile! He could see more clearly than any all the inconsistency, all the folly, all the weakness of the course, to which he had, not so much committed himself, as been tempted to commit himself. The Minister unfaithful, the patriot importuned, were parts in which he saw himself exposed to the town, to the sallies of Tom Brown, and the impertinences of Ned Ward; nay, in proportion as he appreciated the grandeur of honest rebellion, of treason, open and declared, he felt shame for the pettiness of the part he had himself played, a waverer when trusted, and a palterer when in power.

Such reflections weighed on him so heavily that though one of the proudest and therefore to those below him one of the most courteous and considerate of men, he could scarcely bring himself to face his subordinates, when the hour came for him to attend the office. Sir John Trumball still deferred to him, Mr. Vernon still bowed until the curls of his wig hid his stout red cheeks, the clerks where he came still rose, pale, smug, and submissive, in his honour. But he fancied—quite falsely—some-

thing ironical in this respect; he pictured nods and heard words behind his back; and suspecting the talk, which hushed at his entrance rose high on his departure, to be at his expense, he underwent a score of martyrdoms before he returned to St. James's Square.

Meanwhile the absence of the King aggravated his position; firstly, by depriving him of the only confidant his pride permitted him; secondly, by adding to his troubles the jealousies which invariably attend government by a Council. Popularly considered, he was first Minister of the Crown, and deepest in the King's confidence. But the knowledge that one of his colleagues withheld a matter from him, and was in private communication with William in respect to it, was not rendered less irksome by the suspicion, amounting almost to a certainty, that his own concern in the business was that of a culprit. This it was which first and most intimately touched his dignity; and this it was which at the end of a fortnight of suspense drove him to a desperate resolution. He would broach the matter to the Duke of Devonshire; and learn the best and the worst of it.

Desiring to do this in a manner the least formal he took occasion to dismiss his coach at the next

Council meeting, and telling the Duke that he wished to mention a matter to him, he begged a seat in his equipage. But whether the Lord Steward foresaw what was coming and parried the subject discreetly, or my lord's heart failed him, they reached the Square, and nothing said, except on general topics. There, my lord's people coming out to receive them, it seemed natural to ask the Duke of Devonshire to enter; but my lord, instead, begged the Duke to drive him round and round a while; and when they were again started, "I have not been well lately," he said—which was true, more than one having commented on it at the Council Table—"and I wished to tell you, that I fear I shall find it necessary to go into the country for a time."

"To Roehampton?" said his companion, after a word or two of regret.

"No, to Eyford."

For a moment his Grace of Devonshire was silent; and my lord without looking at him had the idea that he was startled. At length as the coach went by London House, "I would not do that—just at this time," he said, quietly.

"Why not?" asked my lord.

"Because—well, for one thing, the King's service may suffer."

"That is not your reason!" quoth my lord, stubbornly. "You are thinking of the Fenwick matter."

Again the other Duke delayed his answer: but when he spoke his voice was both kind and earnest. "Frankly, I am," he said. "If you know so much, Duke, you know that it would have an ill-appearance."

"How?" said my lord, "Let me tell you that all Sir John knows or can know, the King knows—and has known for some time."

This time there was no doubt that the Lord Steward was startled. "You cannot mean it, Duke," he said, in a constrained voice, and with a gesture of reproach. "You cannot mean that it was with his Majesty's knowledge you had a meeting with Sir John, he being outlawed at the time and under ban? That were to make His Majesty at best an abettor of treason; and at worst a viler thing! For to incite to treason and then to persecute the traitor—but it is impossible!"

"I have not the least notion what your Grace means," my lord said, in a freezing tone. "What is this folly about a meeting with Sir John?"

The Duke of Devonshire was as proud as my patron; and nothing in the great mansion which he was then building in the wilds of the Derbyshire Peak was likely to cause the gaping peasants more astonish-

ment than he felt at this set-back. "I don't understand your Grace," he said, at last, in a tone of marked offence.

"Nor I you," my lord answered, thoroughly roused.

"I am afraid—I have said too much," said the other, stiffly.

"Or too little," my lord retorted. "You must go on now."

"Must? Must?" quoth the Duke, whose high spirit had ten years before led him to strike a blow that came near to costing him his estate.

"Ay, must—in justice," said my lord. "In justice to me as well as to others."

After a brief pause, "That is another thing," answered the Lord Steward civilly. "But—is it possible, Duke, that you know so much, and do not know that Sir John asserts that you met him at Ashford two days only before his capture, and entrusted him with a ring and a message—both for St. Germain's?"

"At Ashford?"

"Yes."

"This is sheer madness," my lord cried, holding his hand to his head. "Are you mad, Devonshire, or am I?"

Whether the Duke, having heard Sir John's story and marked his manner of telling it, had prejudged the cause, or thought that my lord over-acted surprise, he did not immediately answer; and when he did speak, his tone was dry, though courteous. "Well, of course—it may be Sir John who is mad," he said.

"D——n Sir John," my lord answered, sitting up in the coach and fairly facing his companion. "You do not mean to tell me that you believe this story of a cock and a bull, and a—a——"

"A ring," said the Duke of Devonshire, quietly.

"Well?"

"Well, Duke, it is this way," the Lord Steward replied. "Sir John has something to say about three others, Lord Marlborough, Ned Russell, and Godolphin. And what he says about them I know in the main to be true. Therefore——"

"You infer that he is telling the truth about me?" cried my lord, fuming, yet covering his rage with a decent appearance since a hundred eyes were on them as they drove slowly round in the glass coach.

"Not altogether. There are other things."

“What other things?”

“The talk there was about your Grace and Middleton at the time of your resignation.”

My lord groaned. “All the world knows that, it seems,” he said. “And should know that I have never denied it.”

“True.”

“But this! It is the most absurd, the most ridiculous, the most fantastical story! How could I go out of town for twenty-four hours, and the fact not be known to half London? Let Sir John name the day.”

“He has,” the other Duke answered. “He lays it on the tenth of June.”

“Well?”

“There was a Land Bank meeting of the Council on that day. But your Grace did not attend it.”

“No? No, I remember I did not. It was the day my mother was taken ill. She sent for me, and I lay at her house that night and the next.”

His Grace of Devonshire coughed. “That is unfortunate,” he said, and leaned forward to bow to the

Bishop of London, whose chariot had just entered the Square.

"Why?" said my lord, ready to take offence at anything.

"Because, though I do not doubt your word, the world will require witnesses. And Lady Shrewsbury's household is suspect. Her Jacobite leanings are known, and her people's evidence would go for little. That that should be the day—but there, there, your Grace must take courage," the Duke continued kindly. "All that the party can do will be done. Within the week Lord Portland will be here bringing his Majesty's commands, and we shall then know what he proposes to do about it. If I know the King, and I think I do——"

But the picture which these words suggested to my lord's mind was too much for his equanimity. To know for certain that the King, who had extended indulgence to him once, was in possession of this new accusation, and perhaps believed it, that was bad enough. But to hear that Portland also was in the secret, and grim, faithful Dutchman as he was, might presently, in support of the low opinion of English fidelity which he held, quote him, the first Minister of England, was too much! In a hoarse voice he cut the Duke short, asking to be set down

before they quarrelled; and his Grace, hastening with a hurried word of sympathy to comply, my lord stepped out, and looking neither to right nor left, passed into the house, and to the library, where, locking the door, he shut himself in with his trouble.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HAVE commonly reckoned it among my lord's greatest misfortunes that in a crisis of his affairs which demanded all the assistance that friendship, the closest and most intimate could afford, he had neither wife nor child to whom he could turn, and from whom, without loss of dignity, he might receive comfort and support. He was a solitary man; separated from such near relations as he had, by differences as well religious as political, and from the world at large by the grandeur of a position which imposed burdens as onerous as the privileges it conferred were rare.

To a melancholy habit, which some attributed to the sad circumstances attendant on his father's death, and others to the change of faith, which he had been induced to make on reaching manhood, he added a natural shyness and reserve, qualities which, ordinarily veiled from observation by manners and an address the most charming and easy in the world, were none the less obstacles, where friendship

was in question. Not that of friendship there was much among the political men of that day; the perils and uncertainties of the time inculcated a distrust, which was only overcome where blood or marriage cemented the tie—as in the case of Lords Sunderland, Godolphin, and Marlborough, and again of the Russells and Cavendishes. But, be that as it may, my lord stood outside these bonds, and enjoyed and rued a splendid isolation. As if already selected by fortune for that strange combination of great posts with personal loneliness, which was to be more strikingly exhibited in the death-chamber of her late Majesty Queen Anne, he lived, whether in his grand house in St. James's Square, or at Eyford among the Gloucestershire Wolds, as much apart as any man in London or in England.

Withal, I know, men called him the King of Hearts. But the popularity, of which that title seemed the sign and seal, was factitious and unreal; born, while they talked with him, of his spontaneous kindness and boundless address; doomed to perish an hour later, of spite and envy, or of sheer inanition. Since the Duke was sensitive, over-proud for intimacy, flattered no man, and gave no man confidences.

Such an one bade fair, when in trouble, to eat out his heart. Prone to fancy all men's hands against

him, he doubled the shame and outdid the most scandalous. So far, indeed, was he from deriving comfort from things that would have restored such men as my Lord Marlborough to perfect self-respect and composure, that I believe, and in fine had it from himself, that the letter which the King wrote to him from Loo (and which came to his hands through Lord Portland's, three days after the interview with his Grace of Devonshire) pained him more sensibly than all that had gone before.

"You may judge of my astonishment," His Majesty wrote, "at his effrontery in accusing you. You are, I trust, too fully convinced of the entire confidence which I place in you to think that such stories can make any impression on me. You will observe this honest man's sincerity, who only accuses those in my service, and not one of his own party."

It will be understood that that in His Majesty's letter which touched my lord home was less the magnanimity displayed in it than the remembrance that once before the Sovereign had dealt with the subject in the same spirit, and that now the world must know this. Of the immediate accusation, with all its details of time and circumstance, he thought little, believing, not only that the truth must quickly sweep it away, but that in the meantime few would

be found so credulous as to put faith in it. But he saw with painful clearness that the charge would rub the old sore and gall the old raw; and he winced, seated alone in his library in the silence of the house, as if the iron already seared the living flesh. With throes of shame he foresaw what staunch Whigs, such as Somers and Wharton, would say of him; what the *Postboy* and the *Courant* would print of him; what the rank and file of the party—exposed to no danger in the event of a Restoration, and consequently to few temptations to make their peace abroad—would think of their trusted leader, when they learned the truth.

On Marlborough and Russell, Godolphin and Sunderland, the breath of suspicion had blown: on him never, and he had held his head high. How could he meet them now? How could he face them? Nay, if that were all, how, he asked himself, could he face the honest Nonjuror? Or the honest Jacobite? Or the honest Tory? He, who had taken the oaths to the new government and broken them, who had set up the new government and deceived it, who had dubbed himself patriot—*cui bono?* Presently brooding over it, he came to think that there was but one man in England, *turpissimus*; that it would be better in the day of reckoning for the meanest

carted pickpocket, whose sentence came before him for revision, than for the King's Secretary in his garter and robes!

Nor, if he had known all that was passing, and all that was being said, among those with whom his fancy painfully busied itself, would he have been the happier. For Sir John's statement got abroad with marvellous quickness. Before Lord Portland arrived from Holland the details were whispered in every tavern and coffee-house within the Bills. The Tories and Jacobites, aiming above everything at finding a counterblast to the Assassination Plot, the discovery of which had so completely sapped their credit with the nation, pounced on the scandal with ghoulish avidity, and repeated and exaggerated it on every occasion. Every Jacobite house of call, from the notorious Dog in Drury Lane, the haunt of mumpers and foot-pads, to the Chocolate House in St. James's rang with it. For Sir John, all (they said among themselves) that they had expected of him was surpassed by this. He was extolled to the skies alike for what he had done and for what he had not done; and as much for the wit that had confounded his enemies as for the courage that had protected his friends. For what Jacobite, seeing the enemy hoist with his own petard could avoid a snigger? Or hear

the word Informer without swearing that Sir John was the most honest man who ever signed his name to a deposition.

The Whigs on the other hand, exasperated by an attack as subtle as it was unforeseen, denied the charges with a passion and fury that of themselves betrayed apprehension. Here, they said, was another Taafe; suborned by the same gang and the same vile machinations that had brought about the Lancashire failure, and hounded Trenchard to his death. Not content with threatening Sir John with the last penalties of treason and felony, and filling the Rose Tavern with protestations, which admitted the weight while they denied the truth of the charges brought against their leaders, the party called aloud for meetings, enquiries, and prosecutions; to which the leaders soon found themselves pledged, whether they would or no.

My lord out of sensitiveness, or that over-appreciation of what was due to himself and others which in a degree unfitted him for public life, had a week before this, pleading indisposition, begun to keep the house; and to all requests proffered by his colleagues that he would take part in their deliberations, returned a steadfast negative. This notwithstanding, everything that was done was communicated to him;

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and announcements of the meetings, which it was now proposed to hold—one at Lord Somers' in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the other at Admiral Russell's—would doubtless have been made to him within the hour. As it chanced, however, he received the news from another source. On the day of the decision, as he sat alone, dwelling gloomily on the past, the Square was roused at the quietest time of the forenoon by an arrival. With a huge clatter, the Countess's glass chariot, with its outriders, running footmen, and lolling waiting-women, rolled up to the door; and in a moment my lady was announced.

It is probable that there was no one whom he had less wish to see. But he could not deny himself to her; and he rose with an involuntary groan. The Countess on her side was in no better temper, as her first words indicated. "My life, my lord, what is this I hear," she cried roundly, as soon as the door closed upon her. "That you are lying down to be trodden on! And cannot do this, and will not do that, but pule and cry at home while they spin a rope for you! Sakes, man, play the one side, play the other side—which you please! But play it! play it!"

My lord, chagrined as much by the intrusion as by the reproach, answered her with more spirit than

he was wont to use to her. "I thought, Madam," he answered sharply, "that the one thing you desired was my withdrawal from public life?"

"Ay, but not after this fashion!" she retorted, striking her ebony cane on the floor and staring at him, her reddled face and huge curled wig trembling. "If all I hear be true—and I hear that they are going to hold two inquests on you—and you continue to sit here, it will be a fine withdrawal! You will be doomed by James and blocked by William, and that d——d rogue John Churchill will wear your clothes! Withdrawal say you? No, if you had withdrawn six months ago when I bade you, you would have gone and been thanked. But now, the fat is in the fire, and, wanting courage, you'll frizzle, my lad."

"And whom have I to thank for that, Madam?" he asked, with bitterness.

"Why, yourself, booby!" she cried.

"No, Madam, your friends!" he replied—which was so true and hit the mark so exactly that my lady looked rather foolish for a moment. Without noticing the change, however, "Your friends, Madam," he continued, "Lord Middleton and Sir John Fenwick, and Montgomery, and the rest, whom you have never ceased pressing me to join! Who unable to

win me will now ruin me. But you are right, Madam. I see, for myself now, that it is not possible to play against them with clean hands, and therefore I leave the game to them."

"Pack of rubbish!" she cried.

"It is not rubbish, Madam, as you will find," he answered coldly. "You say they will hold two inquests on me? There will be no need. Within the week my resignation of all my posts will be in the King's hands."

"And you?"

"And I, Madam, shall be on my way to Eyford."

Now there is nothing more certain than that for a year past the Countess had strained every nerve to detach the Duke from the Government, with a view to his reconciliation with King James and St. Germain's. But, having her full share of a mother's pride, she was as far from wishing to see him retire after this fashion as if she had never conceived the notion. And to this the asperity of her answer bore witness. "To Eyford?" she cried, shrilly. "More like to Tower Hill! Or the Three Trees and a thirteenha'penny fee—for that is your measure! God, my lad, you make me sick! You make me sick!" she continued, her wrinkled old face distorted by the violence of her rage, and her cane going tap-a-tap in her half-

palsied hand. "That a son of mine should lack the spirit to turn on these pettifoggers!"

"Your friends, Madam," he said remorselessly.

"These perts and start-ups! But you are mad, man! You are mad," she continued. "Mad as King Jamie was when he fled the country—and who more glad than the Dutchman! And as it was with him so it will be with you. They will strip you, Charles. They will strip you bare as you were born! And the end will be, you'll lie with Ailesbury in the Tower, or bed with Tony Hamilton in a garret—*là-bas!*"

"Which is precisely the course to which you have been pressing me," he replied with something of a sneer.

"Ay, with a full purse!" she screamed. "With a full purse, fool! With Eyford and fifty thousand guineas, my lad! But go, a beggar, as you'll go, and it is welcome you'll be—to the doorkey and the kennel, or like enough to King Louis' Bastile! Tell me, man, that this is all nonsense! That you'll show your face to your enemies, go abroad and be King again!"

My lord answered gravely that his mind was quite made up.

"To go?" she gasped. "To go to Eyford?" And

raising her stick in her shaking hand, she made a gesture so menacing that, fearing she would strike him, my lord stepped back.

Nevertheless, he answered her firmly. "Yes, to Eyford. My letter to the King is already written."

"Then that for you, and your King!" she shrieked; and in an excess of uncontrolled passion, she whirled her stick round and brought it down on a stand of priceless Venice crystal which stood beside her; being the same that Seigniors Soranzo and Venier had presented to the Duke in requital of the noble entertainment which my lord had given to the Venetian Ambassadors, the April preceding. The blow shivered the vases, which fell in a score of fragments to the floor; but not content with the ruin she had accomplished, the Countess struck fiercely again and again. "There's for you, you poor speechless fool!" she continued. "That a son of mine should lie down to his enemies! There was never Brudenel did it. But your father, he too was a——"

"Madam!" he said, taking her up grimly. "I will not hear you on that!"

"Ay, but you shall hear me!" she screamed, and yet more soberly. "He, too, was a——"

"Silence!" he said; and this time, low as his voice rang, ay, and though it trembled, it stilled her.

"Silence, Madam," he repeated, "or you do that, which neither the wrong you wrought so many years ago to him you miscall, nor those things common fame still tells of you, nor differences of creed, nor differences of party, have prevailed to effect. Say more of him," he continued, "and we do not meet again, my lady. For I have this at least from you—that I do not easily forgive."

She glared at him a moment, rage, alarm, and vexation, all distorting her face. Then, "The door!" she hissed. "The door, boor! You are still my son, and if you will not obey me, shall respect me. Take me out, and if ever I enter your house again——"

She did not complete the sentence, but lapsed into noddings and mowings and mutterings, her fierce black eyes flickering vengeance to come. However, my lord paid no heed to that, but glad, doubtless, to be rid of her visit even at the cost of his Venetian, offered her his arm in silence and led her into the hall and to her chariot.

She could not avenge herself on him; and it might be, she would not if she could. But there was one on whom her passion alighted, who with all her cunning little expected the impending storm. The most astute are sometimes found napping. And

the smoothest pad-nag will plunge. Whether the favourite waiting-woman had overstepped her authority of late, presuming on a senility, which existed indeed, but neither absolutely blinded my lady nor was to be depended on in face of gusts of passion such as this; whether this was the case, I say, or Monterey, rendered incautious by success, was unfortunate enough to betray her triumph, by some look of spite and malice during the drive home, it is certain that at the door the storm broke. Without the least warning the Countess, after using her arm to descend, turned on her, a very Bess of Bedlam.

“And you, you grinning ape!” she cried, “you come no farther! This is no home of yours; begone, or I will have you whipped! You don’t go into my house again!”

The astonished woman, taken utterly aback, and not in the least understanding, began to remonstrate. Her first thought was that the Countess was ill. “Your ladyship—is not well?” she cried, with solicitude veiling her alarm. “You cannot mean——”

“Ay, but I can! I can!” the old lady answered, mocking her. “You have done mischief enow, and do no more here! Where is that man of yours, who went, and never came back, and nought but excuses? And now this.”

“Oh, my lady, what ails you?” the waiting-woman cried. “What does this mean?”

“You know!” said my lady with an oath. “So begone about your business, and don’t let me see your face again or it will be the worse for you.”

Disarmed of her usual address by the suddenness of the attack, the Monterey began to whimper; and again asked how she had offended her and what she had done to deserve this. “I, who have served you so long, and so faithfully?” she cried. “What have I done to earn this?”

“God and you know—better than I do!” was the fierce answer. And then, “Williams,” the Countess cried to her major-domo, who, with the lacqueys and grooms, was standing by, enjoying the fall of the favourite—“see that that drab does not cross my threshold again; or you go, do you hear? Ay, mistress, you would poison me if you could!” the old lady went on, gibing, and pointing with her stick at the face, green with venom and spite, that betrayed the baffled woman’s feelings. “Look at her! Look at her! There is Madame Voisin for you! There is Madame Turner! She would poison you all if she could. But you should have done it yesterday, you slut! You will not have the chance now. Put her rags out here—here on the road; and do you, Williams, send

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her packing, and see she takes naught of mine, not a pinner or a sleeve, or she goes to Paddington fair for it! Ay, you drab," my lady continued, with cruel exultation, "I'll see you beat hemp yet! and your shoulders smarting!"

"May God forgive you!" cried the waiting-woman, fighting with her rage.

"He may or He may not!" said the dreadful old lady, coolly turning to go in. "Anyway, your score won't stand for much in the sum, my girl."

And not until the Countess had gone in and Madame Monterey saw before her the grinning faces of the servants, as they stood to bar the way, did she thoroughly take in what had happened to her, or the utter ruin of all her prospects which this meant. Then, choking with passion, rage, despair, "Let me pass," she cried, advancing and trying frantically to push her way through them. "Let me pass, you boobies. Do you hear? How dare——"

"Against orders, Madame Voisin!" said the major-domo with a hoarse laugh; and he thrust her back. And when, maddened by the touch, and defeat, she flung herself on him in a frenzy, one of the lacqueys caught her round the waist lifting her off her legs, carried her out screaming and scratching, and set

her down in the road amid the laughter of his companions.

“There,” he said, “and next time better manners, mistress, or I’ll drop you in the horse pond. You are not young enough, nor tender enough for these airs! Ten years ago you might have scratched all you pleased!”

“Strike you dead!” she cried, “my husband—my husband shall kill you all! Ay, he shall!”

“When he gets out of the Gatehouse, we will talk, mistress,” the man answered. “But he’s there, and you know it!”

CHAPTER XIX.

My lord persisted in his design of retiring to Eyford; nor could all the persuasions of his friends, and of some who were less his friends than their own, induce him to attend either the meeting of the party at Admiral Russell's, or that which was held in Lincoln's Inn Fields; a thing which I take to be in itself a refutation of the statement, sometimes heard in his disparagement, that he lacked strength. For it is on record that his Grace of Marlborough, in the great war, where he had in a manner to contend with Emperors and Princes, held all together by his firmness and conduct; yet he failed with my lord, though he tried hard, pleading as some thought in his own cause. To his arguments and those of Admiral Russell and Lord Godolphin, the hearty support of the party was not lacking, if it could have availed. But as a fact, it went into the other scale, since in proportion as his followers proclaimed their faith in my lord's innocence, and denounced his accusers, he felt shame for the old folly and in-

consistency, that known by some, and suspected by more, must now be proclaimed to the world. It was this which for a time paralysed the vigour and intellect that at two great crises saved the Protestant Party; and this, which finally determined him to leave London.

It was not known, when he started, that horse-patrols had been ordered to the Kent and Essex roads in expectation of His Majesty's immediate crossing. Nor is it likely that the fact would have swayed him had he known it, since it was not upon His Majesty's indulgence—of which, indeed, he was assured—or disfavour, that he was depending; my lord being moved rather by considerations in his own mind. But at Maidenhead, where he lay the first night, Mr. Vernon overtook him—coming up with him as he prepared to start in the morning—and gave him news which presently altered his mind. Not only was His Majesty hourly expected at Kensington, where his apartments were being hastily prepared, but he had expressed his intention of seeing Fenwick at once, and sifting him.

“Nor is that all,” Mr. Vernon continued. “I have reason to think that your Grace is under a complete misapprehension as to the character of the charges that are being made.”

"What matter what the charges are?" my lord replied wearily, leaning back in his coach. For he had insisted on starting.

"It does matter very much—saving your presence, Duke," Mr. Vernon answered bluntly; a sober and downright gentleman, whose after-succession to the Seals, though thought at the time to be an excessive elevation, and of the most sudden, was fully justified by his honourable career. "Pardon me, I must speak. I have been swayed too long by your Grace's extreme dislike of the topic."

"Which continues," my lord said drily.

"I care not a jot if it does!" Mr. Vernon cried impetuously, and then met the Duke's look of surprise and anger with, "Your Grace forgets that it is treason is in question! High Treason, not in the clouds and *in præterito*, but *in præsenti* and in Kent! High Treason in aiding and abetting Sir John Fenwick, an outlawed traitor, and by his mouth and hand communicating with and encouraging the King's enemies."

"You are beside the mark, sir," my lord answered, in a tone of freezing displeasure. "That has nothing to do with it. It is a foolish tale which will not stand a minute. No man believes it."

"May be! But by G——d! two men will prove it."

"Two men?" quoth my lord, his ear caught by that.

"Ay, two men! And two men are enough, in treason."

My lord stared hard before him. "Who is the second?" he said at last.

"A dubious fellow, yet good enough for the purpose," the Under-Secretary answered, overjoyed that he had at last got a hearing. "A man named Matthew Smith, long suspected of Jacobite practices, and arrested with the others at the time of the late conspiracy, but released, as he says——"

"Well?"

"Corruptly," quoth the Under-Secretary coolly, and laid his hand on the check-string.

My lord sprang in his seat. "What?" he cried; and uttered an oath, a thing to which he rarely condescended. Then, "It is true I know the man——"

"He is in the Countess's service."

"In her husband's. And he was brought before me. But the warrant was against one John Smith—or William Smith, I forget which—and I knew this man to be Matthew Smith; and the messenger himself avowing a mistake, I released the man."

"Of course," said Mr. Vernon, nodding impatiently. "Of course, but that, your Grace, is not

the gravamen. It is a more serious matter that he alleges that he accompanied you to Ashford, that you there in his presence saw Sir John Fenwick, that you gave Sir John a ring—and, in a word, he confirms Sir John's statement in all points. And there being now two witnesses, the matter becomes grave. Shall I stop the coach?" And he made again as if he would twitch the cord.

The Duke, wearing a very sober face—yet one wherein the light of conflict began to flicker—drummed softly on the glass with his fingers. "How do you come by his evidence?" he said at last. "Has Sir John approved against him?"

"No, but Sir John sent for him the morning he saw Devonshire for the second time, and I suppose threatened him, for the fellow went to Trumball and said that he had evidence to give touching Sir John, if he could have His Majesty's word he should not suffer. It was given him, more or less; and he confirmed Sir John's tale *totidem verbis*. They have had him in the Gatehouse these ten days, it seems, on Trumball's warrant."

The Duke drew a deep breath. "Mr. Vernon, I am much obliged to you," he said. "You have played the friend in my teeth. I see that I have treated this matter too lightly. Sir John, unhappy

as he is in some of his notions, is a gentleman, and I was wrong to think that he would accuse me out of pure malice and without grounds. There is some ill practice here."

"Devilish ill," Mr. Vernon answered, scarce able to conceal his delight.

"Some plot."

"Ay, plot within plot!" cried the Under-Secretary, chuckling. "Shall I pull the string?"

The Duke hesitated, his face plainly showing the conflict that was passing in his mind. Then, "If you please," he said.

And so there the coach came to a standstill, as I have often heard, on an old brick bridge short of Nettlebed, near the coming into the village from Maidenhead. One of the outriders, spurring to the carriage window for orders, my lord cried "Turn! Maidenhead!"

"No, London," said Mr. Vernon firmly. "And one of you," he continued, "gallop forward, and have horses ready at the first change house. And so to the next."

The Duke, his head in a whirl with what he had heard, pushed resistance no farther, but letting the reins fall from his hands, consented to be led by his companion. In deference to his wishes, however

—not less than to his health, which the events of the last few weeks had seriously shaken—it was determined to conceal his return to town; the rather as the report of his absence might encourage his opponents, and lead them to show their hands more clearly. Hence, in the common histories of the day, and even in works so learned and generally well-informed as the Bishop of Salisbury's and Mr. ———'s, it is said and asserted that the Duke of Shrewsbury retired to his seat in Gloucestershire before the King's return, and remained there in seclusion until his final resignation of the Seals. It is probable that by using Mr. Vernon's house in place of his own, and by his extreme avoidance of publicity while he lay in town, my lord had himself to thank for this statement; but that in making it these writers, including the learned Bishop, are wanting in accuracy, the details I am to present will clearly show.

Suffice it that entering London late that night, my lord drove to Mr. Vernon's, who, going next morning to the office, presently returned with the news that the King had ridden in from Margate after dining at Sittingbourne, and would give an audience to Sir John on the following day. But, as these tidings did no more than fulfil the expectation, and scarcely accounted for the air of briskness and

satisfaction which marked the burly and honest gentleman, it is to be supposed that he did not tell the Duke all he had learned. And, indeed, I know this to be so.

CHAPTER XX.

ABOUT ten on the morning of the 3rd of November of that year eight gentlemen of the first rank in England were assembled in the gallery at Kensington, awaiting a summons to the King's closet. With the exception of Lord Godolphin, who had resigned his office three days earlier, all belonged to the party in power, notwithstanding which, a curious observer might have detected in their manner and intercourse an air of reserve and constraint, unusual among men at once so highly placed, and of the same opinions. A little thought, however, and a knowledge of the business which brought them together, would have explained the cause of this.

While the Duke of Devonshire, the Marquis of Dorset, and Lord Portland formed a group apart, it was to be noticed that Lords Marlborough and Godolphin and Admiral Russell, who seemed to fall naturally into a second group—and though the move-

ments of the company constantly left them together—never suffered this arrangement to last; but either effected a temporary change, by accosting the Lord Keeper or Mr. Secretary Trumball, or through the medium of Sir Edward Russell's loud voice and boisterous manners, wrought a momentary fusion of the company.

"By the Eternal, I am the most unlucky fellow," the Admiral cried, addressing the whole company, on one of these occasions. "If Sir John had lied about me only, I should have given it him back in his teeth, and so fair and square; it is a poor cook does not know his own batch. But because he drags in the Duke, and the Duke chooses to get the fantods, and shirks him, I stand the worse!"

"Sir Edward," said Lord Dorset, speaking gravely and in a tone of rebuke, "No one supposes that the Duke of Shrewsbury is aught but ill. And, allow me to say that under the circumstances you are unwise to put it on him."

"But d——n me, he has no right to be ill!" cried the seaman, whose turbulent spirit was not easily put down. "If he were here, I would say the same to his face. And that is flat!"

He was proceeding with more, but at that moment the door of the Royal closet was thrown open,

and a gentleman usher appeared, inviting them to enter. "My lords and gentlemen," he said, "His Majesty desires you to be seated, as at the Council. He will be presently here."

The movement into the next room being made, the conversation took a lower tone, each speaking only to his neighbour; one, discussing the King's crossing and the speed of his new yacht, another the excellent health and spirits in which His Majesty had returned; until a door at the lower end of the room being opened, a murmur of voices, and stir of feet were heard, and after a moment's delay, Sir John Fenwick entered, a prisoner, and with a somewhat dazed air advanced to the foot of the table.

The Lord Steward rose and gravely bowed to him; and this courtesy, in which he was followed by all except the Admiral, was returned by the prisoner.

"Sir John," said the Duke of Devonshire, "the King will be presently here."

"I am obliged to your Grace," Fenwick answered, and stood waiting.

His gaunt form, clothed in black, his face always stern and now haggard, his eyes—in which pride and fanaticism, at one moment overcame and at another gave place to the look of a hunted beast—

these things would have made him a pathetic figure at any time and under any circumstances. How much more when those who gazed on him knew that he stood on the brink of death! and knew, too, that within a few moments he must meet the prince whom for years he had insulted and defied, and in whose hands his fate now lay!

That some, less interested in the matter than others, harboured such thoughts, the looks of grave compassion which Lords Devonshire and Dorset cast on him seemed to prove. But their reflections—which, doubtless, carried them back to a time when the most brilliant and cynical of courtiers played the foremost part in the Whitehall of the Restoration—these, no less than the mutterings and restless movements of Russell, who, in his enemy's presence, could scarcely control himself, were cut short by the King's entrance.

He came in unannounced, and very quietly, at a door behind the Lord Steward; and all rising to their feet, he bade them in a foreign accent, "Good-day," adding immediately, "Be seated, my lords. My Lord Steward, we will proceed."

His entrance and words, abrupt, if not awkward, lacked alike the grace which all remembered in Charles, and the gloomy majesty which the second

James had at his command. And men felt the lack. Yet, as he took his stand, one hand lightly resting on the back of the Lord Steward's chair, the stooping sombre figure and sallow, withered face staring out of its great *peruque*, had a dignity of their own. For it could not be forgotten that he was that which no Stuart King of England had ever been—a soldier and a commander from boyhood, at home in all the camps of Flanders and the Rhine, familiar with every peril of battle and breach; at his ease anywhere, where other men blenched and drew back. And the knowledge that this was so invested him with a certain awe and grandeur even in the eyes of courtiers. On this day he wore a black suit, relieved only by the ribbon of the Garter; and as he stood he let his chin sink so low on his breast, that his eyes, which could on occasion shine with a keen and almost baleful light, were hidden.

The Lord Steward, in obedience to his command, was about to address Sir John, when the King, with a brusqueness characteristic of him, intervened. "Sir John," he said, in a harsh, dry voice, and speaking partly in French, partly in English, "your papers are altogether unsatisfactory. Instead of giving us an account of the plots formed by you and your accomplices, plots of which all the details must be exactly

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known to you, you tell us stories without authority, without date, without place, about noblemen and gentlemen, with whom you do not pretend to have had any intercourse. In short, your confession appears to be a contrivance, intended to screen those who are really engaged in designs against us, and to make me suspect and discard those in whom I have good reason to place confidence. If you look for any favour from me, therefore, you will give me this moment, and on this spot, a full and straightforward account of what you know of your own knowledge. And—but do you tell him the rest, my lord.”

“Sir John,” said the Lord Steward in a tone serious and compassionate, “His Majesty invites your confidence, and will for good reasons show you his favour. But you must deserve it. And it is his particular desire that you conclude nothing from the fact that you are admitted to see him.”

“On the contrary,” said the King, dryly, “I see you, sir, for the sake of my friends. If, therefore, you can substantiate the charges you have made, it behoves you to do it. Otherwise, to make a full and free confession of what you do know.”

“Sir,” said Sir John hoarsely, speaking for the first time, “I stand here worse placed than any man ever was. For I am tried by those whom I accuse.”

The King slightly shrugged his shoulders. “*Fal-lait penser là*, when you accused them,” he muttered.

Sir John cast a fierce despairing glance along the table, and seemed to control himself with difficulty. At length, “I can substantiate nothing against three of those persons,” he said; whereon some of those who listened breathed more freely.

“And that is all, sir, that you have to say?” said the King, ungraciously; and as if he desired only to cut short the scene.

“All,” said Sir John firmly, “against those three persons. But as to the fourth, the Duke of Shrewsbury, who is not here——”

The King could not suppress an exclamation of contempt. “You may spare us that fable, sir,” he said. “It would not deceive a child, much less one who holds the Duke high in his esteem.”

Sir John drew himself to his full height, and looked along the table, his gloomy eyes threatening. “And yet that fable I can prove, sir,” he said. “That I can substantiate, sir. To that I have a witness, and a witness above suspicion! If I prove that, sir, shall I have your Majesty’s favour?”

“Perfectly,” said the King, shrugging his shoulders, amid a general thrill and movement; for though

rumours had gone abroad, by no means the whole of Sir John's case was known, even to some at the table. "Prove it! Prove that, sir, and not a hair of your head shall fall. You have my promise."

However, before Sir John could answer, Mr. Secretary Trumball rose in his place and intervened. "I crave your indulgence, sir," he said, "while, with your Majesty's permission, I call in the Duke of Shrewsbury, who is in waiting."

"In waiting," said the King, in a voice of surprise; nor was the surprise confined to him. "I thought that he was ill, Mr. Secretary."

"He is so ill, sir, as to be very unfit to be abroad," the Secretary answered. "Yet he came to be in readiness, if your Majesty needed him. Sir John Fenwick persisting, I ask your Majesty's indulgence while I fetch him."

The King nodded, but with a pinched and dissatisfied face; and Sir William retiring, in a moment returned with the Duke. At his entrance, His Majesty greeted him dryly, and with a hint of displeasure in his manner; thinking probably that this savoured too much of a *coup de théâtre*, a thing he hated. But seeing the next instant, and before the Secretary took his seat, how ill the Duke looked, his face betrayed signs of disturbance; after which, his eyelids droop-

ing, it fell into the dull and Sphinx-like mould which it assumed when he did not wish his thoughts to be read by those about him.

That the Duke's pallor and wretched appearance gave rise to suspicion in other minds is equally certain; the more hardy of those present, such as my Lord Marlborough and the Admiral, being aware that nothing short of guilt, and the immediate prospect of detection, could so change themselves. And while some felt a kind of admiration, as they conned and measured the stupendous edifice of skilful deceit, which my lord had so long and perfectly concealed behind a front of brass, as to take in all the world, others were already busied with the effect it would have on the party, and how this might be softened, and that explained, and in a word another man substituted with as little shock as possible for this man. Nor were these emotions at all weakened when my lord, after saluting the King, took his seat, without speaking or meeting the general gaze.

"Now, sir," said the King impatiently, when all was quiet again, "the Duke is here. Proceed."

"I will," Sir John answered with greater hardness than he had yet used, "I have simply to repeat to his face what I have said behind his back: that on the 10th of last June, in the evening, he met me

at Ashford, in Kent, and gave me a ring and a message, bidding me carry both with me to St. Germain's."

My lord looked slowly round the table; then at Sir John. And it startled some to see that he had compassion in his face.

"Sir John," he said—after, as it seemed, weighing the words he was about to speak, "you are in such a position, it were barbarous to insult you. But you must needs, as you have accused me before His Majesty and these gentlemen, hear me state, also before them, that there is not a word of truth in what you say."

Sir John stared at him and breathed hard. "*Mon dieu!*" he exclaimed at length. And his voice sounded sincere.

"I was not at Ashford on the 10th of June," the Duke continued with dignity, "or on any day in that month. I never saw you there, and I gave you no ring."

"*Mon dieu!*" Sir John muttered again; and, his gaze fallen, he seemed to be unable to take his eyes off the other.

Now it is certain that whatever the majority of those present thought of this—and the demeanour of the two men was so steadfast that even Lord

Marlborough's acumen was at fault—the King's main anxiety was to be rid of the matter, and with some impatience he tried to put a stop to it at this point. "Is it worth while to carry this farther, my lords?" he said, fretfully. "We know our friends. We know our enemies also. This is a story *pour rire*, and deserving only of contempt."

But Sir John at that cried out, protesting bitterly and fiercely, and recalling the King's promise, and the Duke being no less urgent—though as some thought a little unseasonably for his own interests—that the matter be sifted to the bottom, the King had no option but to let it go on. "Very well," he said ungraciously, "if he will have his witness let him." And then, with one of those spirits of peevishness, which stood in strange contrast with his wonted magnanimity, he added, to the Duke of Shrewsbury, "It is your own choice, my lord. Don't blame me."

The querulous words bore a meaning which all recognised; and some at the table started, and resumed the calculation how they should trim their sails in a certain event. But nothing ever became the Duke better than the manner in which he received that insinuation. "Be it so, sir," he said with spirit. "My choice and desire is that Sir John have

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as full a share of justice as I claim for myself, and as fair a hearing. Less than that were inconsistent with your Majesty's prerogative, and my honour."

The King's only answer was a sulky and careless nod. On which Sir William Trumball, after whispering to the prisoner, went out, and after a brief delay, which seemed to many at the table long enough, returned with Matthew Smith.

CHAPTER XXI.

THAT the villain expected nothing so little as to see the man he was preparing to ruin, I can well believe; and equally that the ordeal, sudden and unforeseen, tried even his iron composure. I have heard that after glancing once at the Duke he averted his eyes; and thenceforth looked and addressed himself entirely to the end of the table where the King stood. But, this apart, it could not be denied that he played his part to a marvel. Known to more than one as a ruffling blade about town, who had grown sober but not less dangerous with age and the change of times, he had still saved some rags and tatters of a gentleman's reputation; and he dressed himself accordingly, insomuch that, as he stood beside

Sir John, his stern set face, and steadfast bearing, made an impression not unfavourable at the set out.

Nor when bidden by the King to speak and say what he knew, did he fall below the expectations which his appearance had created, though this was probably due in some measure to my lord's self-control, who neither by word nor sign betrayed the astonishment he felt, when a man to whom for years past he had only spoken casually, and once in six months as it were, proceeded to recount with the utmost fullness and particularity every detail of the journey, which, as he said, they two had taken together to Ashford. At what time they started, where they lay, by what road they travelled—at all Smith was pat. Nor did he stop there; but went on to relate with the same ease and exactness the heads of talk that had passed between Sir John and his companion at the inn.

Nor was it possible that a story so told, with minutiae, with date, and place, and circumstances, should fall on ears totally deaf. The men who listened were statesmen, versed in deceptions and acquainted with affairs—men who knew Oates and had heard Dangerfield; yet, as they listened, they shut their eyes and reopened them, to assure themselves that this was not a dream! Before his appearance, even

Lord Portland, whose distrust of English loyalty was notorious, had been inclined to ridicule Sir John's story as a desperate card played for life; and this, even in teeth of my lord's disorder, so incredible did it appear that one of the King's principal Ministers should stoop to a thing so foolish. Now, it was a sign pregnant of meaning that no one looked at his neighbour, but all gazed either at the witness or at the table before them. And some who knew my lord best, and had the most affection for him, felt the air heavy, and the stillness of the room oppressive.

Suddenly the current of the story was broken by the King's harsh accent. "What was the date?" he asked, "on which you reached Ashford?"

"The 10th of June, sir."

"Where was the Duke on that day?" William continued; and he turned to the Lord Steward. His tone and question, implying the most perfect contempt for the tale to which he was listening, to an extent broke the spell; and had the reply been satisfactory all would have been over. But the Duke of Devonshire, turning to my lord for the answer, got only that he lay those two nights at his mother's, in the suburbs; and thereon a blank look fell on more than one face. The King, indeed, sniffed and muttered, "Then twenty witnesses can confute this!" as

if the answer satisfied, and was all he had expected; but that others were at gaze, and in doubt, was as noticeable, as that those who looked most solemn and thoughtful, were the three who had themselves stood in danger that day.

At a nod from the King, Smith resumed his tale; but in a moment he was pulled up short by Lord Dorset, who requested His Majesty's leave to put a question. Having got permission, "How do you say that the Duke—came to take *you* with him?" the Marquis asked sharply.

"To take me, my lord?"

"Yes."

"Must I answer that question?"

"Yes," said Lord Dorset, with grave dignity.

"Well, simply because I had been the medium of communication between his Grace and Sir John," Smith answered, dryly. "Even as on former occasions I had acted as agent between his Grace and Lord Middleton."

My lord started violently and half rose.

Then, as he fell back into his seat, "That, sir, is the first word of truth this person has spoken," he said, with dignity. "It is a fact that in the year '92 he twice brought me a note from Lord Middleton and arranged a meeting between us."

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"Precisely," Smith answered with effrontery, "as I arranged this meeting."

On that for the first time my lord's self-control abandoned him. He started to his feet. "You lie!" he cried, vehemently. "You lie in your teeth, you scoundrel! Sir—pardon me, but this is—this is too much! I cannot sit by and hear it!"

By a gesture not lacking in kindness, the King bade him resume his seat. Then, "*Peste!*" he said, taking snuff with a droll expression of chagrin. "Will anyone else ask a question. My Lord Dorset has not been fortunate. As the *Advocatus Diaboli*, perhaps, he may one day shine."

"If your Majesty pleases," Lord Marlborough said, "I will ask one. But I will put it to Sir John, and he can answer it or not as he likes. How did you know, Sir John, that it was the Duke of Shrewsbury who met you at Ashford, and conferred with you there?"

"I knew the Duke," Sir John answered clearly. "I had seen him often, and spoken with him occasionally."

"How often had you spoken to him before this meeting?"

"Possibly on a dozen occasions."

"You had not had any long conversation with him?"

"No; but I could not be mistaken. I know him," Sir John added, with a flash of bitter meaning, "as well as I know you, Lord Marlborough!"

"He gave his title?"

"No, he did not," Sir John answered. "He gave the name of Colonel Talbot."

Someone at the table—it was Lord Portland—drew his breath sharply through his teeth; nor could the impression made by a statement that at first blush seemed harmless, and even favourable to the Duke, be ignored or mistaken. Three out of four who sat there were aware that my lord had used that name in his wild and boyish days, when he would be *incognito*; and, moreover, the use of even that flimsy disguise cast a sort of decent probability over a story, which at its barest seemed credible. For the first time the balance of credit and probability swung against my lord; a fact subtly indicated by the silence which followed the statement and lasted a brief while; no one at the table speaking or volunteering a farther question. For the time Matthew Smith was forgotten—or the gleam of insolent triumph in his eye might have said somewhat. For the time Sir John took a lower seat. Men's

minds were busy with the Duke, and the Duke only; busy with what the result would be to him, and to the party, were this proved; while most, perceiving dully and by instinct that they touched upon a great tragedy, shrank from the *dénouement*.

At last, in the silence, the Duke rose; and swaying blindly on his feet, caught at the table to steady himself. For two nights he had not slept.

"Duke," said the King suddenly, "you had better speak sitting."

The words were meant in kindness, but they indicated a subtle change of attitude—they indicated that even the King now felt the need of explanation and a defence; and my lord, seeing this, and acknowledging the invitation to be seated only by a slight reverence, continued to stand, though the effort made his weakness evident. Yet when he had cleared his throat and spoke, his voice had the old ring of authority—with a touch of pathos added, as of a dying King from whose hand the sceptre was passing.

"Sir," he said, "the sins of Colonel Talbot were not few. But this, to which this fellow speaks, is not of the number. Nor have you, or my lords, to do with them. Doubtless, with my fellows, I shall have to give an account of them one day. But as

to the present, and the Duke of Shrewsbury—with whom alone you have to deal—I will make a plain tale. This man has said that in '92 he was a go-between, for me and Lord Middleton. It is true; as you, sir, know, and my lords if they know it not already, must now know, to my shame. For the fact, Lord Middleton and I were relations, we met more than once at that time, we supped together before he went to France. I promised on my part to take care of his interests here, he in return offered to do me good offices there. As to the latter I told him I had offended too deeply to be forgiven; yet tacitly I left him to make my peace with the late King if he could. It was a folly and a poltroonery," the Duke continued, holding out his hands with a pathetic gesture. "It was, my lords, to take a lower place than the meanest Nonjuror who honourably gives up his cure. I see that, my lords; and have known it, and it has weighed on me for years. And now I pay for it. But for this"—and with the word my lord's voice grew full and round and he stood erect, one hand among the lace of his steinkirk tie and his eyes turned steadfastly on his accuser—"for this which that man, presuming on an old fault and using his knowledge of it, would foist on me, I know nothing of it! I know nothing of it. It is some base

and damnable practice. At this moment and here I cannot refute it; but at the proper time and in another place I shall refute it. And now and here I say that as to it, I am not guilty—on my honour!”

As the last word rang through the room he sat down, looking round him with a kind of vague defiance. There was a silence, broken presently by the Lord Steward, who rose, his voice and manner betraying no little emotion. “His Grace is right, sir, I think,” he said. “I believe with him that this is some evil practice; but it is plain that it has gone so far that it cannot stop here. I would suggest therefore that if your Majesty sees fit——”

A knock at the door interrupted him, and he turned that way impatiently, and paused. The King, too, glanced round with a gesture of annoyance. “See what it is,” he said.

Sir William Trumball rose and went; and after a brief conference, during which the lords at the table continued to cast impatient glances towards the door, he returned. “If it please you, sir,” he said, “a witness desires to be heard.” And with that his face expressed so much surprise that the King stared at him in wonder.

“A witness?” said the King, and pished and fidgeted in his chair. Then, “This is not a Court

of Justice," he continued, peevishly. "We shall have all the world here presently. But—well, let him in."

Sir William obeyed, and went and returned under the eyes of the Council; nor will the reader who has perused with attention the earlier part of this history be greatly surprised to hear that when he returned, I, Richard Price, was with him.

I am not going to dwell on the misery through which I had gone in anticipation of that appearance; the fears which I had been forced to combat, or the night watches, through which I had lain, sweating and awake. Suffice it that I stood there at last, seeing in a kind of maze the sober lights and dark rich colours of the room, and the faces at the table all turned towards me; and stood there, not in the humble guise befitting my station, but in velvet and ruffles, sword and peruke, the very double, as the mirror before which I had dressed had assured me, of my noble patron. This, at Mr. Vernon's suggestion and by his contrivance.

While I had lived in my lord's house, and moved to and fro soberly garbed, in a big wig or my own hair, the likeness had been no more than ground for a nudge and a joke among the servants. Now, dressed once more, as Smith had dressed me, in a

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suit of the Duke's clothes, and one of his perukes, and trimmed and combed by one who knew him, the resemblance I presented was so remarkable that none of the lords at the table could be blind to it. One or two, in sheer wonder, exclaimed on it; while Sir John, who, poor gentleman, was more concerned than any, fairly gasped with dismay.

It was left to the Duke of Devonshire to break the spell. "What is this? Who is this?" he said, in the utmost astonishment. "What does it mean?"

The King, who had noted on an occasion that very likeness, which all now saw, and was the first to read the riddle, laughed dryly. "Two very common things, my lord," he said, "a rogue and a fool. Speak, man," he continued, addressing me. "You were in the Duke's household awhile ago? *n'est-ce pas ça?* I saw you here?"

"Yes, your Majesty," I said, hardly keeping my fears within bounds.

"And you have been playing his part, I suppose? Eh? At—how do you call the place—Ashford?"

"Yes, your Majesty—under compulsion," I said, trembling.

"Ay! Compulsion of that good gentleman at the foot of the table, I suppose?"

The words of assent were on my lips, when a cry, and an exceeding bitter cry, stayed their utterance. It came from Sir John. Dumbfounded for a time, between astonishment and suspicion, between wonder what this travesty was and wonder why it was assumed, he had at length discerned its full scope and meaning, and where it touched him. With a cry of rage he threw up his hands in protest against the fraud; then in a flash he turned on the villain by his side. "You d——d scoundrel!" he cried. "You have destroyed me! You have murdered me!"

Before he could be held off, his fingers were in Smith's neckcloth, and clutching his throat; and so staunch was his hold that Admiral Russell and Sir William Trumball had to rise and drag him away by force. "Easy, easy, Sir John," said the Admiral with rough sympathy. "Be satisfied. He will get his deserts. Please God, if I had him on my ship an hour his back should be worse than Oates's ever was!"

Sir John's rage and disappointment were painful to witness, and trying even to men of the world. But what shall I say of the fury of the man at bay, who denounced and convicted in his moment of triumph saw, white-faced, his long-spun web swept

easily aside? Doubtless he knew, as soon as he saw me, that the game was lost, and could have slain me with a look. And most men would without more ado have been on their knees. But he possessed, God knows, a courage as rare and perfect as the cause in which he displayed it was vile and abominable; and in a twinkling he recovered himself, and was Matthew Smith once more. While the room rang with congratulations, questions, answers and exclamations, and I had much ado to answer one half of the noble lords who would examine me, his voice, raised and strident, was heard above the tumult.

“Your Majesty is easily deceived!” he cried, his very tone flouting the presence in which he stood; yet partly out of curiosity, partly in sheer astonishment at his audacity, they turned to listen. “Do you think it is for nothing his Grace keeps a double in his house? Or that it boots much whether he or his Secretary went to meet Sir John? But enough! I have here! here,” he continued, tapping his breast and throwing back his head, “that, that shall out-face him; be he never so clever! Does his double write his hand too? Read that, sir. Read that, my lords, and say what you think of your Whig leader!”

And with a reckless gesture, he flung a letter on the table. But the action and words were so lack-

ing in respect for royal chambers that for a moment no one took it up, the English lords who sat within reach disdaining to touch it. Then Lord Portland made a long arm, and taking the paper with Dutch phlegm and deliberation opened it.

"Have I your Majesty's leave?" he said; and the King nodding peevishly, "This is not his Grace's hand-writing," the Dutch lord continued, pursing up his lips, and looking dubiously at the script before him.

"No, but it is his signature!" Smith retorted, fiercely. And so set was he on this last card he was playing, that his eyes started from his head, and the veins rose thick on his hands where they clutched the table before him. "It is his hand at foot. That I swear!"

"Truly, my man, I think it is," Lord Portland answered, coolly. "Shall I read the letter, sir?"

"What is it?" asked the King, with irritation.

"It appears to be a letter to the Duke of Berwick, at the late Bishop of Chester's house in Hogsden Gardens, bidding him look to himself, as his lodging was known," Lord Portland answered, leisurely running his eye down the lines as he spoke.

It was wonderful to see what a sudden gravity fell on the faces at the table. This touched some

home. This was a hundred times more likely as a charge than that which had fallen through. Could it be that after all the man had his Grace on the hip? Lord Marlborough showed his emotion by a face more than commonly serene; Admiral Russell by a sudden flush; Godolphin by the attention he paid to the table before him. Nor was Smith behindhand in noting the effect produced. For an instant he towered high, his stern face gleaming with malevolent triumph. He thought that the tables were turned.

Then, "In whose hand is the body of the paper?" the King asked.

"Your Majesty's," Lord Portland answered, with a grim chuckle, and after a pause long enough to accentuate the answer.

"I thought so," said the King. "It was the Friday the plot was discovered. I remember it. I am afraid that if you impeach the Duke, you must impeach me with him."

At that there was a great roar of laughter, which had not worn itself out before one and another began to press their congratulations on the Duke. He for his part sat as if stunned; answering with a forced smile where it was necessary, more often keeping silence. He had escaped the pit dugged for him,

and the net so skilfully laid. But his face betrayed no triumph.

Matthew Smith, on the other hand, brought up short by that answer, could not believe it. He stood awhile, like a man in a fit; then, the sweat standing on his brow, he cried that they were all leagued against him; that it was a plot; that it was not His Majesty's hand! and so on, and so on; with oaths and curses, and other things very unfit for His Majesty's ears, or the place in which he stood.

Under these circumstances, for a minute no one knew what to do, each looking at his neighbour, until the Lord Steward, rising from his chair, cried in a voice of thunder, "Take that man away, Mr. Secretary, this is your business! Out with him, sir!" On which Sir William called in the messengers, and they laid hands on him. By that time, however, he had recovered the will and grim composure which were the man's best characteristics; and with a last malign and despairing look at my lord, he suffered them to lead him out.

CHAPTER XXII.

THAT was a great day for my lord, but it was also, I truly believe, one of the saddest of a not unhappy life. He had gained the battle, but at a cost

known only to himself, though guessed by some. The story of the old weakness had been told, as he had foreseen it must be told; and even while his friends pressed round him and crying, *Salve Imperator!* rejoiced in the fall he had given his foes, he was aware of the wound bleeding inwardly, and in his mind was already borne out of the battle.

Yet in that room was one sadder. Sir John, remaining at the foot of the table, frowned along it, gloomy and downcast; too proud to ask or earn the King's favour, yet shaken by the knowledge that now—now was the time; that in a little while the door would close on him, and with it the chance of life—life with its sunshine and air, and freedom, its whirligigs and revenges. Some thought that in consideration of the trick which had been played upon him, the King might properly view him with indulgence; and were encouraged in this by the character for clemency which even his enemies allowed that Sovereign. But William had other views on this occasion; and when the hubbub which Smith's removal had caused had completely died away, he addressed Sir John, advising him to depend rather on deserving his favour by a frank and full discovery, than on such ingenious contrivances as that which had just been exposed.

"I was no party to it," the unhappy gentleman answered.

"Therefore it shall tell neither for nor against you," the King retorted. "Have you anything more to say?"

"I throw myself on your Majesty's clemency."

"That will not do, Sir John," the King answered. "You must speak, or—the alternative does not lie with me. But you know it."

"And I choose it," Sir John cried, recovering his spirit and courage.

"So be it," said His Majesty slowly and solemnly. "I will not say that I expected anything less from you. My lords, let him be removed."

And with that the messengers came in and Sir John bowed and went with them. It may have been fancy, but I thought that as he turned from the table a haggard shade fell on his face, and a soul in mortal anguish looked an instant from his eyes. But the next moment he was gone.

I never saw him again. That night the news was everywhere that Goodman, one of the two witnesses against him, had fled the country; and for a time it was believed that Sir John would escape. How, in face of that difficulty those who were determined on his death, effected it; how he was attainted, and how

he suffered on Tower Hill with all the forms and privileges of a peer—on the 28th of January of the succeeding year—is a story too trite and familiar to call for repetition.

On his departure the Council broke up, His Majesty retiring. Before he went, a word was said about me, and some who had greater regard for the *post factum* than the *pœnitentia* were for sending me to the Compter, and leaving the Law Officers to deal with me. But my lord, rousing himself, interposed roundly, spoke for me and would have given bail had they persisted. Seeing, however, how gravely he took it, and being inclined to please him, they desisted, and I was allowed to go, on the simple condition that the Duke kept me under his own eye. This he very gladly consented to do.

Nor was it the only kindness he did me, or the greatest; for having heard from me at length and in detail all the circumstances leading up to my timely intervention, he sent for me a few days later, and placing a paper in my hands bade me read the gist of it. I did so, and found it to be a free pardon passed under the Great Seal, and granted to Richard Price and Mary Price his wife for acts and things done by them jointly or separately against the

King's Most Excellent Majesty, within or without the realm.

It was at Eyford he handed me this; in the oak parlour looking upon the bowling-green; where I had already begun to wait upon him on one morning in the week, to check the steward's accounts and tallies. The year was nearly spent, but that autumn was fine, and the sunlight which lay on the smooth turf blended with the russet splendour of the beech trees that rise beyond. I had been thinking of Mary and the quiet courtyard at the Hospital, which the bowling-green somewhat resembled, being open to the park on one side only; and when perusing the paper, my lord smiling at me, I came to her name—or rather to the name that was hers and yet mine—I felt such a flow of love and gratitude and remembrance overcome me as left me speechless; and this directed, not only to him but to her—seeing that it was her advice and her management that had brought me against my will to this haven and safety.

The Duke saw my emotion and read my silence aright. “Well,” he said. “Are you satisfied?”

I told him that if I were not I must be the veriest ingrate living.

“And you have nothing more to ask?” he continued, still smiling.

"Nothing," I said. "Except—except that which it is not in your lordship's power to grant."

"How?" said he, with a show of surprise and resentment. "Not satisfied yet? What is it?"

"If she were here!" I said. "If she were here, my lord! But Dunquerque——"

"Is a far cry, eh! And the roads are bad. And the seas——"

"Are worse," I said gloomily, looking at the paper as Tantalus looked at the water. "And to get word to her is not of the easiest."

"No," the Duke said. "Say you so? Then what do you make of this, faint-heart?" And he pointed through the open window.

I looked, and on the seat—which a moment before had been vacant—the seat under the right-hand yew-hedge where my lord sometimes smoked his pipe—I saw a girl seated with her shoulder and the nape of her neck turned to us. She was making marks on the turf with a stick she held, and poring over them when made, as if the world held nothing else, so that I had not so much as a glimpse of her face. But I knew that it was Mary.

"Come," said my lord, pleasantly. "We will go to her. It may be, she will not have the pardon—after all. Seeing that there is a condition to it."

“A condition?” I cried, a little troubled.

“To be sure, blockhead,” he answered, in high good-humour. “In whose name is it?”

Then I saw what he meant and laughed, foolishly. But the event came nearer to proving him true than he then expected. For when she saw the paper she stepped back and put her hands behind her, and would not touch or take it; while her small face cried pale mutiny. “But I’ll not tell!” she cried. “I’ll not tell! I’ll not have it. Blood-money does not thrive. If that is the price——”

“My good girl,” said my lord, cutting her short, yet without impatience. “That is not the price. This is the Price. And the pardon goes with him.”

* * * * *

I believe that I have now told enough to discharge myself of that which I set out to do: I mean the clearing my lord in the eyes of all judicious persons of those imputations which a certain faction have never ceased to heap on him; and this with the greater assiduity and spite, since he by his single conduct at the time of the late Queen’s death was the means under Providence of preserving the Protestant Succession and liberties in these islands.

That during the long interval of seventeen years that separated the memorable meeting at Kensington,

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which I have ventured to describe, from the still more famous scene in the Queen's death-chamber, he took no part in public life has seemed to some a crime or the tacit avowal of one. How far these err, and how ill-qualified they are to follow the workings of that noble mind, will appear in the pages I have written; which show with clearness that the retirement on which so much stress has been laid, was due not to guilt, but to an appreciation of honour so delicate that a spot invisible to the common eye seemed to him a stain *non subito delanda*. After the avowal made before his colleagues—of the communications, I mean, with Lord Middleton—nothing would do but he must leave London at once and seek in the shades and retirement of Eyford that peace of mind and ease of body which had for the moment abandoned him.

He went: and for a time still retained office. Later, notwithstanding the most urgent and flattering instances on the King's part—which yet exist, honourable alike to the writer and the recipient—he persisted in his resolution to retire; and on the 12th of December, 1698, being at that time in very poor health, the consequence of a fall while hunting, he returned the Seals to the King. In the autumn of the following year he went abroad; but though he

found in a private life—so far as the life of a man of his princely station could be called private—a happiness often denied to place men and favourites, he was not to be diverted when the time came from the post of danger. Were I writing an eulogium merely, I should here enumerate those great posts and offices which he so worthily filled at the time of Queen Anne's death, when as Lord Treasurer of England, Lord Chamberlain, and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland—an aggregation of honours I believe without precedent—he performed services and controlled events on the importance of which his enemies no less than his friends are agreed. But I forbear: and I leave the task to a worthier hand.

This being so, it remains only to speak of Matthew Smith and his accomplice. Had my lord chosen to move in the matter, there can be no doubt that Smith would have been whipped and pilloried, and in this way would have come by a short road to his deserts. But the Duke held himself too high, and the men who had injured him too low, for revenge; and Smith, after lying some months in prison, gave useful information, and was released without prosecution. He then tried to raise a fresh charge against the Duke, but gained no credence; and rapidly sinking lower and lower, was to be seen

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two years later skulking in rags in the darkest part of the old Savoy. In London I must have walked in hourly dread of him; at Eyford I was safe; and after the winter of '99, in which year he came to my lord's house to beg, looking broken and diseased, I never saw him.

I was told that he expected to receive a rich reward in the event of the Duke's disgrace, and on this account was indifferent to the loss of his situation in my lady's family. It seems probable, however, that he still hoped to retain his influence in that quarter by means of his wife, and thwarted in this by that evil woman's dismissal, was no better disposed to her than she was to him. They separated; but before he went the ruffian revenged himself by beating her so severely that she long lay ill in her apartments, was robbed by her landlady, and finally was put to the door penniless, and with no trace of the beauty which had once chained my heart. In this plight, reduced to be the drudge of a tradesman's wife, and sunk to the very position in which I had found her at Mr. D——'s, she made a last desperate appeal to the Duke for assistance.

He answered by the grant of a pension, small but sufficient, on which she might have ended her days in a degree of comfort. But, having acquired

in her former circumstances an unfortunate craving for drink, which she had now the power to gratify, she lived but a little while, and that in great squalor and misery, dying, if I remember rightly, in a public-house in Spitalfields in the year 1703.

THE END.

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